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YOUNG MISS GIDDY.

BY ALBERT ROSS.

AUTHOR OF

"WHY I'M SINGLE," "HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER,"
"THOU SHALT NOT," "IN STELLA'S SHADOW,"
"AN ORIGINAL SINNER," ETC.

"Things have got to be pretty bad, haven't they? Were they always so, or has this age gone to the devil, all by itself?"—Page 35.



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CONTENTS.

Chapter		Page
I.	The Poor Girl and the Rich One....	9
II.	Senator from Van Buren.....	19
III.	"Luvv, what's Luvv?".....	32
IV.	Esther's Strike for Freedom.....	44
V.	"Marriage is a nuisance.".....	55
VI.	She Would be a Lady.....	67
VII.	Fifteen Million Dollars.....	79
VIII.	"Dave, I am a devil!".....	90
IX.	A Dinner at Flora's.....	105
X.	"If a girl could find a man".....	116
XI.	Florida in Winter.....	125
XII.	Going to Mardi Gras.....	133
XIII.	"You'll see nothing but 'cham.'".....	141
XIV.	A Glimpse of Hamburg.....	151
XV.	"Not on the morning after.".....	162
XVI.	Drunk as a Fool.....	169
XVII.	A Devil of a Mess.....	178
XVIII.	"Marriage is sometimes a cure.".....	186
XIX.	"Esther Strange! Good God!".....	196
XX.	Miss Scarlett Proposes Marriage.	207
XXI.	"Do you think, my dear?".....	218
XXII.	Seeing an Old Friend.....	229
XXIII.	"If you leave it to me.".....	240
XXIV.	In the Mexican Monterey	251

2061964

Chapter		Page
XXV.	"Shall I put out the light?"	258
XXVI.	A Night at Garcia	271
XXVII.	In the Virgin's Cave	279
XXVIII.	"I must confess some things."	287
XXIX.	"Ah! It is terrible! terrible!"	297
XXX.	A Surprised Husband	304
XXXI.	A Freezing-Out Process	313
XXXII.	"Arrest this man!"	321
XXXIII.	What Bayley Told Parton	332
	A Parting Word	341

TO MY READERS.

Last summer, in a symposium printed in the *Boston Globe*, a number of prominent people discussed the question of chaperonage as applied to American girls. One of them, the wife of a well-known gentleman, used in effect the expression that I have put into the mouth of Senator Scarlett. If a girl had a tendency to behave improperly, said this lady, all the oversight in the world would not be likely to prevent it. Instead of writing a letter to that journal, giving my opinion on this proposition, as I at first intended to do, I have made it the theme of a novel, and here you have it.

Incidentally I have also kept a promise made to numerous friends in the Southern States and in Mexico, to introduce local scenes in a future story. A year ago I "followed the strawberry" a thousand miles below the Tropic of Cancer and could easily have written a book much larger than this one upon the incidents of that trip. The reader will see how impossible it is for me to do more in this volume than allude to the principal points of that delightful journey.

It becomes necessary to remind some of my kind correspondents that the enclosure of a stamp is considered good form when a reply is desired. So far

I have tried to answer all letters, briefly, though they sometimes amount to a dozen a week, and the postage for the thoughtless ones is quite an item. And let me say another thing in this connection. If an autograph is the thing desired it is just as easy to say so as to ask where my novels can be purchased. This amusing inquiry comes to me almost every day, and I am a little tired of replying with the single word "Everywhere," which is the modest fact. Besides, it does not make a pretty response for exhibition purposes.

A Happy New Year to all is the heartfelt wish of the author.

ALBERT ROSS.

Cambridge, Mass.

YOUNG MISS GIDDY.

CHAPTER I.

THE POOR GIRL AND THE RICH ONE.

The daughter of the millionaire, Augustus Scarlett, was entering her carriage at the family mansion on Fifty-second street. This young lady, though only fifteen years of age, was attended in her daily life with a retinue of servants that would have been quite sufficient for a princess. The carriage she was now about to use was kept for her exclusively. The horses, the coachman, the footman, the chaperone, the maid,—the very lap-dog that was going with her,—were never claimed by any other member of the household. Her father had his own equipages, which she often shared with him, but she had hers, always ready at her command, in case she chose to ride when he was otherwise occupied. Her only brother, Charles, never rode but in public conveyances, except on those rare occasions when he accompanied his sister or father. Charles preferred walking when the distance was not too great, and detested everything that savored of fashion or style.

He was a very peculiar fellow, was Charles, and people had begun to speak of him as "a Socialist."

Miss Flora May seated herself upon her comfortable cushions and was about to give the order to her driver to set off when a couple of children that happened to come along the sidewalk attracted and riveted her attention. Both were very plainly dressed. One was a year or two older than herself, a straight, brown-faced lad with a set look that might almost be called surly; the other was a girl of about thirteen, undoubtedly his sister, and yet with an air as different from his as daylight and darkness.

Upon seeing the handsome equipage and its occupants the boy acted as if determined not to appear interested. After one glance his gaze sought the pavement and he seemed to be counting the bricks at his feet. The girl, on the contrary, opened her eyes wider at the sight before her, drinking in the scene with greediness. She realized that here was the antithesis of her own life, this aristocratic child with her horses and servants, and she was entranced to the full in her contemplation.

The girl looked at Miss Flora and Miss Flora looked at the girl. The coachman, too well bred to turn his head, knew what was going on behind him. Madame Saccard, the chaperone, thought what an effective painting the contrasting scene would make, but she did not change a muscle of her French face, nor utter a word. Though twice the age of her pupil she was as careful in expressing her opinions as if the opposite had been the case. Only the lap-dog, impatient to be off, showed his sentiments, by barking in a dissatisfied key.

It all lasted but a moment. The children who were walking passed by, and the child in the carriage spoke to her driver, telling him to proceed toward the Park, which was the destination she had chosen.

"Wasn't that beautiful!" exclaimed the girl on the sidewalk to her brother, when they were out of hearing.

The boy did not reply. He walked on, with his eyes still on the pavement, his face as stolid as before.

"*She* must be *rich!*" continued the sister. "That was her carriage. It takes lots of money to own such things. And of course she lives in that handsome house. Don't you think so?" she added, after a moment, as there were no signs that any answer was intended.

"It's nothing to do with *us*, that's all *I* think about it," said the brother, surlily, thus driven into replying.

"Why, Austin Strange!" cried the girl. "How cross you always are when you see any one who has better things than we! I don't blame people for living just as nice as they can afford. I would have a carriage like that if I could, and a driver and servants—and a lap-dog, too. And I often think," she added, reflectively, "that the day is going to come when I shall."

The boy looked up from the sidewalk, one quick glance. There was a full measure of contemptuous disbelief in that look. He did not, however, deem the prediction worthy of words, and he walked on as silent as before.

The probable pecuniary status of these children

was shown not only in their garments, but in that indefinable air which accompanies poverty when it comes in contact with wealth.

"You might talk to me a little, Austin," said the girl, when they had turned the corner of Fourth avenue and were nearing the neighborhood in which they resided. "How is it some folks get so much money, while others get almost nothing? Look at father: he is a carpenter; he always was a carpenter; he never will be anything else. Three dollars a day is the highest he ever got. Many days together he is out of work because business is dull or the weather is bad. I have heard him say he doesn't average over six hundred dollars a year. It is the same with most of the people that live in the block with us. Now, when you cross the avenue, everything seems different. Over there they have elegant homes, servants, all the money they want. There must be a reason for it, and I think some one ought to be able to find it out."

Austin found his voice then, to utter one brief sentence.

"Esther, you talk like a fool!"

The girl tossed her head.

"It is better to talk like a fool than not to talk at all," she retorted. "If I was a boy I would be ashamed not to know any more than you do. You are going to be just like father—a mechanic, with only enough to keep you from starving and freezing. But I will never consent to live like that. No, I am going to be a lady."

The brother looked up again, with the same contemptuous sneer on his lips.

"*You*, a lady!" he repeated, taking in the whole

of her profile, from the cheap hat on her head to the stout shoes on her feet. "*How?*"

Esther bridled at his manner.

"I don't know exactly," she said, "but I shall do it. I have as good a right to wear fine clothes and ride in a carriage as those girls on the other side of Fourth avenue, and I will find a way. You will never help me, that is certain. And neither will father. And his new wife—who wants me to call her mother, but I never shall—she would rather see me wearing rags. I know that many of the people who are now rich were once as poor as we are. *They* found out the way to fortune, and so shall I."

Austin Strange was not a lad who talked a great deal. At home he never spoke unless some one addressed him first, and then he replied in the briefest terms he could find. He and Esther were not any too fond of each other, and they were seldom found walking the streets together. The statement that he had just heard seemed to irritate him exceedingly, but he did not show his resentment in harsh expressions. He only turned abruptly from her, as they reached a corner, and walked off rapidly in a direction opposite to that in which lay their home.

"Isn't he hateful!" said the girl, aloud, angry at finding herself deserted.

And a pleasant voice at her elbow murmured:

"Well, he isn't very agreeable, that's a fact."

Esther turned and saw a well-dressed young gentleman contemplating her with an amused smile. He was, to judge from appearances, of nineteen

years or thereabout, and of a very different order of society from the one in which her family moved.

"He's your brother, I presume," added the young gentleman, in return for her stare. "Though one wouldn't think it to listen to his excessive taciturnity."

Esther had no idea what interested this stranger in her, but there was something about him that charmed her at first sight. Ordinarily she would have given him a sharp retort, and told him to go about his business.

"I don't exactly know what you mean by 'taciturnity,'" she ventured.

"Your brother does," said the young gentleman. "He understands it very well. And now will you tell me why you wish to be a lady, and why you think you are destined to rise above the station in life into which you were born?"

There was such a laughing quality in the voice of the young gentleman that Esther could not tell whether he had any serious purpose in his inquiry. But the subject had taken a deep hold of her, and she was only too glad of a chance to converse with any one upon it.

"I cannot give a reason," she said, her brow clouding. She had begun to walk along, accompanied by her new companion. "I cannot tell why I expect to be a lady, except that I want to be one very much. As to being born the child of a carpenter, many people have told me it must be a mistake. I am not like the rest of my people. My father is satisfied to saw boards and plane timber all day long. My brother Austin is going to follow the same trade. The only times they complain

is when building is dull and they cannot get enough to do. My stepmother often tells me that in a year or two more I must go to work. All the girls I was brought up with go into shops, or factories, or stores as soon as they are old enough. But I have told her I never will do it. She may talk as much as she pleases, but I never will. There are ways to get rich and I will find out how. I have heard that many of the richest people were once as poor as any one."

Young Douglass Maybury admitted the truth of this statement. He was pleased with the brightness of the queer child, whose head was full of such odd ideas, and he walked along with her willingly, listening to her aims and plans.

"Yes, some of them were as poor as—well, let us say, Job's turkey," he said. "The pretty young girl you saw starting on her ride belongs to that kind of a family. Her father was born in a hovel, I have heard say; and to-day there are not ten men in New York as rich as he."

Esther looked at him with increased excitement.

"Oh, did you see me as far back as that?" she asked. "What a pretty girl she was and what an elegant team she had! You do not—no, you do not know her, do you?"

"I know her a little," he answered. "I have been to her house a number of times. If she had not been going out at the moment, I might have called this morning."

The girl asked the next question with great eagerness.

"Then you have heard, perhaps, how her father got so much money? That is the thing to find out,

where it comes from, this wealth they all seem to have on the other side of Fourth avenue, and nobody has on this side. If I could find that out, I should know how to make a start."

She was too much in earnest for him to laugh at her now. Her dark eyes with their quivering lashes were turned full upon his gray ones.

"I do not know, upon my word, how the Senator made his dollars," he said, "but I can find out for you. I think it was in mines and railroads, and ways like those. And I am afraid that, in any event, it was in things which a little girl like you could not carry on."

For a moment the dark eyes fell at the prospect.

"I want to know, for all that," said the girl, when she lifted them again. "I want to know all I can about rich people who were once poor. Couldn't you inquire and tell me?"

The young gentleman said he would do so with the greatest of pleasure, but he added that he did not yet know where to address his young friend.

"I live at No. — Avenue A," responded the girl, promptly, "and my name is Esther Strange; but you must not write to me there, for my stepmother would open the letter before she gave it to me and scold me for letting you send it. I shall have to meet you somewhere. When do you think you will have learned? I am impatient to know. Could you make it to-morrow evening?"

Though Douglass Maybury was but nineteen years of age, this was not the first time he had made an appointment with a girl; but Esther was so young and so innocent, as he could see by the things she said and the artless way she said them, that he hesi-

tated even to do the apparently harmless thing she asked. A child of that age, it occurred to him, would better obey even the orders of a needlessly severe stepmother than meet a stranger secretly for any purpose whatever. Beginning in this way, who could tell to what the act might lead as she grew older?

It is said that the lion will not attack prey except when he is in want of food, and certainly Douglass had no improper thought in connection with this little, confiding creature. However, it was easier to tell her he would come than to refuse her, and run the risk of seeing her pretty face cloud again, and perhaps her bright eyes overflow with tears.

"There is a man who knows all about the Scarletts," he said, "and he belongs to a club with me. If I can find him, and draw him out, I will bring you the information you wish. Where shall I see you and at what hour?"

Delighted at his compliance, the girl mentioned a small bit of public ground, called by the residents in its vicinity a "park," at which she would await him, when the clock was striking eight.

"That's a bad hour, my little girl," said Maybury. "I dine at half-past seven usually, and—"

"Not till half-past seven!" exclaimed the listener. "Why, we have dinner at noon!"

The young gentleman's face was wreathed in smiles. Her naïvetté was certainly most charming.

"You are very lucky to be served so early," said he. "At my club they are too busy to get around at that hour Is there any reason why you cannot see me at nine?"

Yes, there was a reason. At nine o'clock Mrs.

Strange the second insisted on her stepdaughter being in bed. Still Esther would rather have braved the indignation of her stepmother than have missed the coveted appointment altogether.

"If you could say a quarter-past eight, or even half-past," she began.

"Why not earlier, then?" asked Douglass. "Why not half-past six?"

The girl shook her head.

"That is the time we eat our supper."

Maybury began to remember hearing that these strange hours were kept by members of the lower classes, and he tried to fix on a time when the girl's family would be neither eating nor sleeping. It seemed, according to this child, that they were occupied in one or the other of these things most of the evening.

"I can come at seven," he said, "and dine a little later than usual."

Esther accepted this amendment.

"Now, will you tell me *your* name and where you live?" she asked. "Because, you see, if anything should happen that you were kept from coming, or if I could not get out to meet you, I should want to know where to find you the next time."

She had a long head on her, this child of thirteen! Maybury took out a case, and handed her a card bearing his name and the address of his chambers.

"Thank you," she said, simply. "And be sure you don't forget to inquire all about the father of that handsome girl I saw on Fifty-second street—how he got so much money and everything. One cannot be a lady or a gentleman without plenty of money, *can* they? If you find it all out, and come

and tell me all about it, I will thank you as long as I live!"

Esther Strange was a pretty girl, in spite of the extreme plainness of her attire. Douglass Maybury wondered, as he walked back toward his rooms, how she would look in good clothes—in those garments of a lady which she had begun to crave. She had a well-developed figure for her age, and her rosy cheeks and bright eyes gave promise of a healthful and vigorous womanhood.

"Fortune is idiotic in the distribution of her favors!" he muttered. "Or doesn't she distribute them at all? Does she only keep them for the most selfish—the ones who are willing to grab, and push, and tread their fellows under their feet?"

CHAPTER II.

SENATOR FROM VAN BUREN.

What Mr. Maybury learned at his club that evening, combined with what he already knew, and also with several things that the author has ascertained on his own account, may as well be given to the reader in a single chapter, and at this time.

Augustus Scarlett, millionaire many times over, Senator of the United States from Van Buren, railroad president, mine owner, etc., etc., was born to a poverty so abject that it would be difficult to overstate its depth. At an early age Augustus left the paternal roof, because it leaked so badly that it no

longer afforded him shelter. He deserted the family board, because it seldom had anything upon it worth eating.

With no blessing but a "Scotch" one, he went forth to look for his own food and raiment. His father and mother had freely expressed the opinion that he never would "amount to anything." They were sure he would reflect no credit on the name of Scarlett, this branch of which had little to boast of except that none of its members had ever served terms in the penitentiary. It was seriously feared that Augustus would break even this record, because he detested work on a farm and exhibited a discreditable fondness for soap and water.

The Scarletts owned—barring a mortgage and accrued interest—a few acres of land from which much of their support was supposed to come. In his earliest youth, Augustus unwillingly assisted at the burial of sundry sliced potatoes, and the obsequies of various garden seeds, in the hope that they would achieve a glorious resurrection as the season advanced. But when it became necessary to ply the hoe again, the boy was found wanting in a very literal sense. He had a way of stealing out of the front door and making for the cool retreats of the adjacent wood, where he remained, even at the cost of losing his dinner, until the night came on.

Weeding onions and picking worms from vines had more terrors for him than hunger. And he had a consolation in his wooded retreat that made him forget the recurrence of mealtime. A young friend in the village who possessed a library gave him free access to it. Beneath his poor jacket a book was usually concealed. Absorbed in romance, poetry or

history, the young lad knew nothing of physical appetite. The falling of the curtains of night was the one thing that compelled him to cease his beloved reading.

In a household where a stray almanac,—obtained free from the druggist on account of its medical advertisements,—was the only piece of literature obtainable, it is hardly to be wondered at that this kind of Ugly Duckling was looked upon as a veritable visitation of the wrath of God. He was not at all like the other Scarletts, that was certain. They gave him a soubriquet that they thought very cutting and severe—that of "the gentleman."

"Here comes the gentleman!" his father would say, when Augustus crept back to his cabin at nightfall. "Give him some soap! and some blacking for his shoes! and a bottle of perfumery! He wants to wear paper collars and a pair of cuffs! He will be brushing his hair next, and cleaning his nails! Where have you been all day, you young loafer?"

Although the elder Scarlett was in the habit of using a good deal of objectionable language, he was not addicted to other means of enforcing his opinions. Not one of his seven children could remember that he had ever lifted his hand to strike them. Had he done so to his most unpopular son the severance of the tie between the boy and his family might have come earlier than it did.

Discouraged as both father and mother were with such a lad, the remains of the simple meal they had last indulged in were always set out for him, so that he did not go to bed supperless.

"I don't see where you get your tastes," the elder Scarlett would often assert complainingly, as the mea-

gre supper proceeded. "All you think of is reading and fixing yourself up. You don't see your mother or me doing it. *We* never waste our time; I don't know what our children would do if we did. Where did you learn such things? Did you ever see *me* combing my hair? Do *I* ever wash my hands or black my boots?"

"No, father, no," Augustus would answer, abstractedly.

His thoughts were elsewhere. He knew that interrogations were being addressed to him, but he did not listen to their purport.

"I wonder how you expect to git your living. There won't nobody support you, that I knows on. It's time you was out to work, like Jim and Nan. Jim is getting eight dollars a month and board, and Nan makes four dollars and a half a week in the factory. But you've got to change some of your ways before anybody 'll hire you. I asked Darling last week if he hadn't a place for you in the saw-mill and he said he didn't want no high-toned city chap there. 'He'd have to stop every ten minutes and wash up!' he said. I tell you, Gus, you'll have to turn over a new leaf pretty soon."

"Yes, father," the son would reply, in as great abstraction as before; and, after picking gingerly at the viands set before him, he would go up stairs to bed with his younger brother, "Dolly," the only one of the family who seemed to care for him or for whom he entertained the least spark of affection.

"Dolly" had been named Gustavus Adolphus, after the Swedish king, while Augustus had been christened in honor of the Roman emperor. A sister of Mrs. Scarlett, who had read a book on

history at some period of her life, forwarded names to fit as fast as the children were born, taken in every instance from the ranks of royalty. Even "Jim," the elder boy, was so called after "the Most High and Mighty Prince James, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith," etc., to whom most English-speaking Christians have seen an allusion on the front page of their family Bibles. Nan, the oldest girl, was named for that queen whose style of architecture has been of late so extensively copied in the United States; and the other three Scarletts bore equally distinguished cognomens. The suitability of these selections had never troubled any of the interested parties, though it caused a smile sometimes among the better educated residents of the town where they lived.

At last Augustus Scarlett went forth into the world without even one cent to his name, and with a very small bundle of extra clothing in his hand, nobody caring except little Dolly, who wept dismally all the night before and wailed furiously when the actual exodus took place. And twenty-five years afterward this same Augustus, with the prefix of "Hon." was living in a mansion of his own on Fifty-second street and paying several of his servants a larger salary than was ever earned by any Scarlett except himself that he had known.

Whence the great change? Ah, that would be a long story! The lives of our rich men, given in the illustrated papers, the Congressional Directory, the Biographical Dictionaries, are always aggravatingly incomplete on the important point of how they obtained their fortunes. To be sure, there is a pretense of telling. "Mr. Smith was born in such

a town of very poor parents and had to go out early to seek his own living." That is the ordinary beginning. And then the biographer jumps to some expression like this: "When he was only twenty-four years old he purchased the extensive woolen mills at X——."

"How the deuce," exclaims the reader, "did he get the funds to purchase the mills?" And the chronicler remains pertinaciously silent.

The young man who wants to get rich himself—and what young man does not?—would be much obliged if the writer of Mr. Smith's life would submit that gentleman's cash account during the years that intervened between his excessive poverty and his purchase of "the extensive woolen mills at X——." But it is never given, and I do not see why the writer of a mere work of fiction should be more explicit than his contemporaries of the news columns.

This much was, however, well known. Mr. Scarlett had been the promoter of a railroad that rivalled one of the greatest trunk lines in the country. He had obtained a charter from a legislature which public opinion had driven in spite of itself into favoring his project, as a blow to a gigantic monopoly that was through him to find a rival. Owners of land along his line had treated him generously, thankful that they were soon to have reasonable rates of fare for themselves and of freight for their produce. Courts had rendered opinions in his favor, in documents that tickled the popular ear and were supposed to cause a cold sensation to pass down the backs of the Astorbilts and Vanderfeldts who were

robbing the people by their hitherto unchecked rapacity.

The road had been built, being received everywhere with acclamations. Those who rode over it were compelled to admit that it was not such a smooth running track as the old one—that it had too many sharp curves and lacked stability in construction. Bankers knew it had issued an unwarrantable amount of bonds and stock, at which shrewd investors looked askance. But the public did not care. It had cut rates, that was the main thing for which it was designed ; and it gave out passes with a generous hand.

Editors rode free, of course, (as all editors should) after being compelled to descend to the level of common people and pay their fares over the lines of the monopolistic road. Ministers, with a just regard to proportions, were taken at half price. Shippers were given special rates when they wanted to take an outing.

Oh, it was a great success, that new road ! And then President Scarlett was elected, almost without his consent, to the State Senate. It made no difference what party he belonged to, and in those days he hardly knew himself. Everybody, except a few mean-spirited holders of the rival road's stock, voted for him. He swept the poll, leaving his opponent nothing but a handful of scattering votes.

" The Democratic committee of this district wish your permission to nominate you for the Senate," said the gentlemen who called at Mr. Scarlett's office. " There is no question of your election if you allow your name used. Our only doubt is in reference to your politics. As you have taken no part in

such matters, nobody seems able to state to which side you belong. Of course you are a Democrat, however. A man of your public spirit could hardly be otherwise."

The spokesman paused, smiling sweetly, and for a minute Mr. Scarlett hardly knew how to answer his pointed question. He had never affiliated, especially, with any party. Like Jay Gould, he had been a Democrat in some counties and a Republican in others, as his personal interest seemed to dictate. He did not know whether it was wise to accept honors at the hand of either of the great political organizations, lest it should antagonize men whose influence he needed on the other side. He wanted to consult with his lawyers, and, above all, with his lobbyists.

"I am a very busy man, gentlemen," he said, after a long pause. "I cannot say whether it will be possible for me to accept any office at present. The interests of the road I am managing can hardly be of less moment to the community than matters at the State Capitol. However, I will consider and let you know within a short time."

He then rose with that air which expresses regret at being unable to prolong the conversation. Shaking hands personally with every member of the delegation, he bade them a good-afternoon.

Before the day was ended a committee of Republicans came on precisely the same errand. They were also a little in doubt as to his politics, but had no question that the sympathies of such an eminent man must be on their side of the fence. The answer he gave them was identical with that he had given the other committee. He would think it over; he

was very busy; he thanked them for coming. Each man had his hand shaken warmly as he withdrew.

That night the editors of the party papers in town wrote editorials expressing the hope that Mr. Scarlett would accept the nomination that would certainly be tendered to him. The next day the place was in a furore. The audacity of the "other side" was alluded to by both parties in the most scathing terms. They need not hope to get into power in any such contemptible way. Mr. Scarlett's popularity would be very handy indeed, to settle such a close district.

Reporters, not only of the local press, but from the great metropolitan dailies, sought interviews with the popular gentleman in vain. It was an occasion for the use of his private secretary, who met all comers in the outside office with the statement that Mr. Scarlett could not be seen by any person whatever, and that he would make public his position, over his own signature, when he could find the time to do so.

The lobbyists and the lawyers decided the matter for their employer, after a conference. The answer to the tenders that had been made him was contained in a statement sent simultaneously to both committees and to the press in general.

Mr. Scarlett was already giving every moment of his valuable time to the service of the people; so the document said. It was not clear to him that he could do more if he was sent to the Capitol. He feared, indeed, that he would be unable to perform all his duties there, in his over-worked condition. Still, it was undeniably true that there were matters

connected with the new road on which he might have a more direct and favorable influence if he occupied a seat in the legislative body.

It was, however, a higher matter than that of mere party, and he was obliged to treat it as such. There were friends of Anti-monopoly on both sides. He would work with them wherever they were found. In short, while Mr. Scarlett did not ask nor desire, nor had any personal ambition to go to the State Senate, he would consent to be a candidate of the People, regardless of party, and would accept no other nomination. If elected, he would be bound to no interest but that of the Public. He would be trammelled by no caucus and influenced by no clique. If defeated, it would give him not the least concern.

That was the whole thing, in a nut-shell.

There was consternation in the party committees, for each had felt that, with him as their exclusive candidate, victory was assured in advance. Both saw, however, that there was only one thing to do. Their regular nominations must be allowed to pass for that year. They must do their best to convince the People that *they* were the real Scarlett party.

On election day everybody voted for the man who did not care to run, who had as lief be defeated as not; everybody but the holders of the rival bonds, who were the objects of general hate. These got together and nominated another candidate—one of themselves—who received 187 votes, showing conclusively their entire strength. Mr. Scarlett's vote was 8912.

The new railroad manager, then only twenty-nine years of age, was returned to the Senate on his

second year without a pretense of opposition. The third year he refused peremptorily to run again, though his constituents appealed to him with tears in their eyes. His road was now completed—that is, it was built from end to end so that cars could run over it, taking special care at the bridges. Stations, not beautiful structures like those of the other road, but places at which one could certainly alight from or enter the trains, were scattered here and there. President Scarlett needed and deserved a rest. The prayers of the people followed him, with his young wife and babies, when it was reported in the papers that he had sailed for a year's voyage abroad.

Perhaps the prayers would have been given with less fervor had they been delayed for another month. For at that time it came out that the new railroad had passed into the hands of the Astorbilt and Vanderfeldt monopolists, who had made a deal by which they had absorbed a majority of the stock at a very high figure. The public could hardly believe its eyes and ears. To get the requisite amount of stock to control the directorate the monopolists had had to pay $214 per share for a large quantity. And who had sold them his stock at this rate? Why, the Hon. Augustus Scarlett!

Mr. Scarlett was placed at once among the shrewdest railroad manipulators of his day. In the opinion of Wall street and its newspaper organs he was a very great man. His name would henceforth count as a power on 'Change, there was no doubt of that. One authority placed his present wealth at $2,000,000, another declared, "on reliable information," that it exceeded $5,000,000. At any rate, he

had a good fortune for a young man of thirty, who had started with nothing.

The people along the line of his late road were too stunned to say much. Those who could not get half price for their stock—now that the V.'s and A.'s had got all they wanted, and no dividend was likely to be paid for a long time—cursed quietly to themselves. Most of the others said a man could not be blamed for making his fortune when he got the chance, and that he was no worse than other people. He was a pleasant fellow, anyway, and had been generous to the poor.

The editors found he had not forgotten them altogether. He had made it a condition of his sale that all editorial passes should be renewed annually for at least ten years. The first minister who asked for a half rate got it as before. Really, Scarlett was not as bad as some people would make him out. Probably he could have come back a month after he went away and secured a re-election to the State Senate, a sure test of popular approval.

But in that respect he differed with the cat of legendary notoriety. He did not come back. He remained for a year in Europe, as he had intended, and when he returned to the United States he established two residences. One was in the city of New York, for the purposes of trade in securities, for which he believed he had an aptitude. The other was in the State of Van Buren, west of the Mississippi River, where he purchased a stupendously large acreage of land. Five years later he was a cattle king, silver king and a railroad promoter in many directions. He was a member, also, of the lower house of the National Congress. He was a successful man in

every material direction. He had a handsome wife, a boy of seven, and a daughter of four years. He no longer worked hard at his multifarious duties. It was easier and better in every way to hire able men to do that for him.

He grew to be a veritable Nabob. At the time of his introduction to the reader he was so very wealthy that the figures are quite superfluous. No one would have suspected, had he kept the matter to himself, that he had not been reared in that delightful locality known as the "lap of luxury." But with all his money he had found it necessary to throw this fact into the scale on running for the United States Senate. There was a prejudice in the minds of some of the legislators against extreme wealth, and to carry the majority he had to have printed a picture of the cabin where he was born, which he sent a photographer to find.

A brilliant journalist worked up a touching story of a poor lad who had been forced to leave his childhood's home at a tender age, and had risen by the sheer force of industry to his present proud position. Mr. Scarlett was successful by a majority of three in a hot contest, that first time. The second time he had no such trouble. His lieutenants saw to it that members likely to oppose him were left at home by their constituencies.

The Hon. Augustus did not care anything for the life of the Senate, in itself. He went there because it was, and still is, the proper thing for a man worth over ten millions to do. He spent very little time in the State which he had the honor to represent, but neither did most of his fellow-senators from that region. One of the great interests of the State is

silver, and a silver-mine owner could be depended upon not to vote in opposition to that industry. Nobody cared how else he voted, or whether he voted at all, and he might have remained undisturbed forever in his place were it not for the fact that several men who had also become worth more than ten millions wanted the position, and stood ready to make him fight for it at each recurring election.

Once he was spoken of for Vice-President of the country, but this was only what is known as a "bluff," and was designed to make him appear a National figure for local effect.

CHAPTER III.

"LUVV? WHAT'S LUVV?"

Douglass Maybury had inherited a famous name, and a fortune not at all commensurate with it, in his opinion. His father had been a Judge and his grandfather a Governor, but the wealth of the family decreased with the former, whose tastes were extravagant and whose business qualities were not of the highest order. At the age of nineteen, however, Douglass had given little thought to the future. His expenses had been met with liberality by Mr. Blackstone Coke, the well-known lawyer, in whose charge his affairs were placed by his father's will. He had been allowed to do about as he pleased since his twelfth year, when he was left an orphan, and had divided his time between study and plea-

ure, with hardly any attempt being made to guide him.

He knew in a general way that he would not be a rich man, but he could not have told within fifty per cent. the amount of money at any time remaining in the hands of his father's executor and trustee. Mr. Coke was a gentleman who disliked going into particulars, and Douglass was a client after his own heart. All he had ever said to young Maybury was that he should, by-and-by, make a wealthy marriage, and that his small fortune would probably suffice till this was accomplished.

Maybury repeated this to a member of his club with whom he was on terms of intimacy, Mr. David Bayley, an architect who had already attracted attention among the upper circles for the quality of the work he was doing. There was eight or nine years difference in their ages, but Mr. Bayley was a man who could adapt himself to all kinds of people, and he found the "boy," as he then mentally styled him, rather interesting.

"What an old ass Coke is to say a thing like that to me!" was the way Douglass supplemented his information. "Marry? *I* marry! I would as soon cut my throat."

"He didn't mean that you were to hurry about it, I don't imagine," rejoined the Architect. "It's a thing most men do, you know, at some time in their lives. And it's very good form now-a-days to think of money and matrimony in the same connection. The old-fashioned ideas of love, and love alone, do not obtain any more in American society. Tennyson puts it very well in his Northern Farmer:

'Luvv? What's luvv? thou can luvv thy lass an' her munny too,
Maakin' 'em goa togither as they've good right to do.'"

Young Maybury showed plainly on his face the disgust that he felt.

"It's too commercial," he said, "to think of it in that way. It's like putting one's self up to the highest bidder, like a prize donkey."

"But you must get money somewhere," urged the Architect. "You wouldn't like to go into trade, would you, and you've never begun to fit yourself for a profession. How have you planned to fill that purse of yours when you find it becoming empty?"

The young man lifted his eyebrows as if this was a new thought to him.

"I might buy a kit of burglar's tools," he replied, 'and go to cracking safes. It seems to me, on the whole, more respectable than to sell my body and soul to some rich man's daughter. Speaking of rich men, you know Senator Scarlett pretty well. Could you give me a resumé of his history?"

Without dreaming that there would come a time in the future when he might regret the freedom, Mr. Bayley obligingly detailed to his friend all he knew of Scarlett. He had heard of the low origin of the millionaire, his enrichment out of the railroad he built, his practical purchase of his seat in the Senate, and most of the rest of the story in the preceding chapter. And he told it all without reserve, with the air of a man who likes to show that he knows what is going on in the world.

"But his first actual start on the highway to financial success came in just the way we were recently

talking about," said Bayley. "He got into a railroad office, and gained some promotion by his industry and brightness; but that wouldn't have amounted to much if he hadn't married a daughter of one of the high officials of the road. There is a rumor that the marriage was clandestine—a case of runaway, denunciation and subsequent forgiveness—but I'm not able to swear to that. He certainly married a small fortune, a hundred thousand or so, and used it as a lever to raise himself to his present position."

Mr. Maybury looked thoughtful.

"And the wife?" he asked.

"She died, poor girl, when the daughter was very young. Oh, yes, I suppose he regretted her, and it is unlikely he will ever marry again. But Scarlett" —here the Architect lowered his voice—"is not a saint in the matter of women. He has a mistress, they say, at each of his principal stopping-places, one here, one in Van Buren and one in Washington. That doesn't prove that he didn't love his wife, though. The most devoted husband I ever knew, a man who fairly worshipped his spouse, lost his life in a house of ill-fame at Boston. The lace curtains caught from the gas-jet and set a bed on fire, endangering the girl, and the brave fellow died from injuries received in putting out the flames."

The listener shrugged his shoulders.

"Things have got to be pretty bad, haven't they?" he replied. "Were they always so, or has this age gone to the devil, all by itself?"

The Architect cited several cases in history to show that lapses in marital fidelity were not wholly original to this century. Then he looked at his watch and remarked that he had an engagement.

The next day Douglass Maybury came near forgetting the appointment that he had with the pretty child he had first seen in front of the Scarlett residence on Fifty-second street. Hastening out of doors at seven o'clock, he sprang into a cab and gave the driver a direction that nearly made the man fall off his box.

"Avenue A!" exclaimed the cabby. "Did you say *Avenue A?*"

Maybury coolly repeated the direction, specifying anew the little park that was just beyond the avenue, near the corner of —th street. And the driver took up his whip and gave his astonished horse a clip as if the animal was to blame for the sarcastic manner of his passenger.

The carpenter's little daughter was somewhat abashed when she saw the carriage stop and the young gentleman alight. He looked to her a much more important and formidable individual than he did when she found him, a mere foot passenger like herself, on the pavement. Instead of rushing up to him tumultuously, as she had intended, and plying him with questions, she waited demurely for him to speak. Maybury walked over to Esther and held out his hand frankly.

"Well, I am here, you see," he exclaimed. "And I have learned all I could about our friend, the millionaire, with the daughter who drives her own ponies."

With that he motioned the child to a seat on a bench near by, and placed himself by her side. For fifteen minutes she listened to him with all the interest in the world, and when he ended his recital

she wore the expression of one who is much disappointed.

"Then Mr. Scarlett did not make all his money, himself," she said, summing up what he had told her. "He began by marrying a lady who had property."

"Exactly," replied Douglass. "And that is not so bad a point for you to know," he added, half in earnest, half in joke. "If you are ever to be rich you will more than likely become so by marriage."

Whatever of humor there might be in this subject for him, there was none whatever for his little companion.

"Rich young men do not marry the daughters of carpenters," she said, dolefully. "They never come down to Avenue A for their wives."

"But they may some day," he said. "Who knows?"

She shook her head very decidedly, as if she did not believe it.

"You are a rich young man yourself, are you not? You rode here to-night in a carriage, and you look like those I have seen walking on Fifth avenue Sunday after church. Now, if you wanted to marry, do you think you would come over to this neighborhood?"

He didn't think so in the least, but politeness sometimes demands that answers be given an evasive quality.

"I might," he replied, smilingly. "But, really, I am not rich, nor anything like it. What money I have is going rapidly and will soon be gone."

"Do you work at anything?" she asked.

"Well, not just yet. I have been going to school

—and traveling. But I shall have to do something by-and-by."

She looked him over, from head to foot.

"What could *you* do?"

There was a certain contemptuousness in the question and in the manner of asking it that did not escape him; but he was rather amused than otherwise.

"You must not be too hard on me, Esther," he protested. "I shall come out all right; only give me time."

She colored because he read her thoughts so accurately. But she was not the girl to pretend anything she did not feel.

"If you are not rich there is only one way you ever will be," she persisted. "You will have to marry money, as Mr. Scarlett did."

His face grew darker at that. Must even this child of the East-side diagnose his fate like all the others? Mr. David Bayley had told him the same thing, and Mr. Blackstone Coke, and dozens of people during the last year had intimated it. And he was not yet twenty!

"Well, Esther," he said, "I have kept my promise. I have told you all I know about money-getting. And now let me advise you to be a wise and sensible little girl, and put such matters out of your mind for the next five years. All you ought to do now is to go to school, study hard, and read all the good books you can find. What is your age?"

"Thirteen," she told him, with a gesture of defiance.

"When you are seventeen it will be time enough

to begin to plan your future. You can do nothing before then, and you are only wasting your time."

He was talking as she feared he would when she saw that he came in a cab. If she had known he was this kind of a man she would never have opened her heart to him in the first place. Her disappointment was keen, for she had hoped for much from this interview. She looked at the small tufts of grass that had escaped the feet of the visitors to the park, and did not speak.

"Come, Esther, what do you say?"

"I say I will do nothing of the kind!" she snapped. "In two years my stepmother will want to put me into a shop to work, and I never will go, never! do you hear? And then there will be trouble. My father does whatever she tells him; he has no mind of his own. And what could he do if he had ever so good a will? He is a carpenter—that is all! He can talk about pine and spruce and walnut, he can saw and drive nails and hammer a chisel! Yes, and he can go to meetings of the Socialists, too, and come home saying that the rich men are oppressing those who toil, and that it is time the workmen made different laws and arranged things to suit themselves! He can do all that, but he has no more idea how to get above his station than a spike! And I live with him, and with her, and with that brother of mine that you saw, and listen to them, all day and all the evening, until I am ready to burst with vexation! I do not belong in that family, everyone says so; there was certainly a mistake in my ever being born there. I ought to have come to the other side of Fourth avenue; I know it as well as I know I breathe! And I *am*

going to get there—somehow! 'Wait till I am seventeen,' indeed! By that time I should be a factory girl, tied down for life to a dollar a day, looking like those things that come home at six o'clock with their faces drawn and wrinkled and their backs stooping over! No, I won't do it. I couldn't!"

And the astonished young gentleman saw the child, who had thrown these expressions at him as rapidly as her little tongue could utter them, set off at a rapid pace in the direction of her home, paying no attention whatever to his calls for her to return and talk it over with him.

Douglass could not believe Esther meant to leave him altogether. When he saw she did not turn her head he followed her into the street, and went quite a distance after her, with rapid steps. But though she did not look around, she knew that he was coming and presently broke into a run and distanced him. He did not propose to enter into a race with her, and in a short time he retraced his way and left the neighborhood.

When one has no definite plans or purposes in life it takes very little to influence his acts. Several days later Maybury learned that a friend of his, a young physician named Parton, was about to start on a trip abroad. Douglass had spent a portion of his boyhood in Europe, and had thought for some time of taking another journey to that part of the world. Parton was a fellow he had learned to like, and it struck him as a good idea when the doctor suggested that they go together.

"It would be extremely agreeable," said Parton, with a languid air that was common to him. "I

would even wait a week or two for you to get ready, if necessary."

Maybury laughed at this, saying he had nothing to do but pack a trunk, and that twenty-four hours would be more than ample for all his preparations. It was therefore agreed that they should go on the next steamer, and state-rooms were engaged accordingly.

Mr. Blackstone Coke, on being informed of these things, merely said he hoped Mr. Maybury would enjoy himself. The requisite letter of credit would be sent to his hotel that afternoon. He was turning to his books again when Douglass asked a question:

"That cash of mine—it won't run out when I am on the other side, I hope, and leave me the disagreeable necessity of walking back?"

"No. If you are at all reasonable it will last you some time yet."

"But it is gradually growing 'smaller by degrees and beautifully less,' I understand," said Maybury, "to use the expression of the poet?"

Mr. Coke nodded.

"And when it gets near its end, you perhaps expect me to take your advice, and marry some girl with money?"

Mr. Coke nodded again, much as if he had been asked if it was past eleven.

"Well, I shall never do it!" cried the young man, imitating Esther Strange unconsciously. Then, as it occurred to him whose words he was mimicking, he laughed. "Tell me to a minute how long it will last, that I may be prepared."

The lawyer did not take the trouble even to look in the ledger in his safe containing an accurate

account of the Maybury property, as well as of a hundred others of which he was the custodian. He merely consulted his memory, fully as apt to be correct in such matters.

"You have been drawing at the rate of $5,000 a year," he said. "You will probably wish to increase that by fifty per cent. while you are abroad. If you do not exceed that amount—that is to say $7,500—you may rely on my supplying your wants for something like five years more. If you spend less or indulge in greater drafts on your money, you can easily figure out the difference in dates."

"The devil!" exclaimed Maybury, disgusted. "Is it as bad as that? What a thoughtless set of people my ancestors must have been! I ought to have had a fortune something like Augustus Scarlett's."

Mr. Blackstone Coke lifted his gaze directly at the speaker.

"That is easy enough for you to accomplish," he said, quietly.

"Easy enough?" repeated the younger man.

"Undoubtedly. You are nineteen. The Senator has a daughter who is fifteen, or thereabouts. You know the family. They like you. Keep on good terms with them, wait a proper time—not too long; say till you are twenty-three and she is nineteen. Then—"

He did not finish the sentence with words, as they seemed superfluous; and Mr. Coke was not given to superfluous language.

Douglass looked at the lawyer with rising indignation. Must this man not only join the ranks of those who assumed to advise him to marry for

money, but go farther yet and name the identical party of the second part! A member of the bar for fifty years, who had handled the funds of three generations of Mayburys in a large measure; a man with white hair and a benignant beard, and gold-bowed spectacles. What an old wretch he was! It would be useless to enter into an argument with him, however, and with a word of farewell the client left the office.

There were only a few calls to make before his steamer left her dock, and something drew the young fellow in spite of himself to Fifty-second street. He wanted to take another look at that handsome little daughter of Senator Scarlett's, the girl that silly old lawyer had advised him to marry! He knew the Senator well—his father had taken him there in the first place,—and he had seen Miss Flora frequently from the days when she wore pinafores. He had never thought of her as a woman, or as one who would ever be anything but a sweet, winsome child, her father's pet and the idol of the servants.

Flora came into the parlor to say good-bye to him, when the Senator sent out for her. And Douglass saw she was certainly going to be a woman and a very beautiful one before long.

"You may see May and me in Europe if you stay six months," said Mr. Scarlett. "We have been there a good deal already, you know. May has spent at least half her life abroad, and there are things she will have to go back to complete. A letter sent in care of the Barings will reach you, I presume?"

The Senator always called his daughter May.

Almost every one else spoke of her by her other name.

On the next Saturday young Maybury sailed, and for two years he did not set foot on American shores. During the latter part of his stay he met the Scarletts and saw a great deal of them.

And all this time Esther Strange never relinquished her determination to be "a lady," cost what it might. She went frequently to the little park where she had met the stranger, hoping that he would seek her there, notwithstanding the rude way in which she had left him. Then, emboldened, she sought the address on the card he had given her, and experienced a severe setback when a servant told her that he had left the country and would not return for many months.

But she was not discouraged.

"I *will* be a rich lady some day," she kept insisting to herself. "There are ways by which one can get money, and I will find out what they are."

CHAPTER IV.

ESTHER'S STRIKE FOR FREEDOM.

Those who knew Charles Scarlett, the Senator's son, never expected that his father would make a very great confidant of him. He seemed to have inherited little of the nature of this parent, the keen, shrewd man of business, who, while "grasping the skirts of happy chance," and "breasting the

blows of circumstance," had still found time for the pleasant leisure of life and all the reasonable enjoyments that money can bring. Those who had known his mother said he reminded them of her, as did also his sister Flora. Both gave many evidences of their descent from that sweet-tempered, exceedingly gentle, but ill-fated lady.

Charles had never been delicate, as the phrase is used. Though not addicted to athletic sports he had had no serious illness. He was thoughtful and studious, and his chief trait was generosity. In those earlier years when it first dawned on his mind that there were many in the world with less than he, he would have been willing, like the young Louis Napoleon, to give away the shoes on his feet. Before he was ten years old his favorite way of enjoying himself was to take a carriage and one of the servants and seek the poorer quarters with a load of necessaries to be distributed. And he seldom returned without traces of the tears he had shed because there were so many that he could not supply.

Mr. Scarlett, Sr., believed in letting children follow their own inclinations as far as possible. He was generous in his own way, putting down his name for large sums on subscription papers, but he would have submitted to almost any fine rather than go "slumming," as his son did. Charles showed no inclination to adopt any of the professions, and an infant knew nearly as much about what is termed business. It was evident that he was meant for a scholar and a philanthropist.

Had Charles been able to reconcile the dogmas of the various sects, he might have turned out a

missionary, for he had the spirit of which such men are made. But he could not get interested in theology, though he studied it for some time. He had a mind broader than any of the creeds. He carved out for himself a natural religion that suited him better than any of the ready-made articles so freely offered for sale. The heathen he most wanted to reach were close to his own door. They needed bread and clothes and soap more than they did doctrine. His field was wider than he could ever hope to cover. It seemed to him that he could do more good right there in New York than on the banks of the Zambesi or the Hoang-Ho.

With these views it was natural that he mixed little in what is called society. His associates were mostly of the poorer classes and of men and woman of his own belief. Oppressed with the immensity of the work that opened before him, he found no time for the merely ornamental things of life. He loved his father with an almost idolatrous devotion and felt for his sister the tenderest sentiments. But these were not the ones who needed his care.

Among the more intelligent of the laboring class that Charles Scarlett was thrown in contact with, was a carpenter named Lyman Strange. He had spent many evenings in the company of this man, impressed with the fairness with which he was willing to discuss questions that so often arouse bitterness of feeling. One evening, shortly before Maybury returned from Europe, Charles accompanied Mr. Strange to a meeting of dissatisfied mechanics, where some rather severe things were said against the wealthier employing classes, things

that struck home to Mr. Scarlett, Jr., in a way that nothing up to that time had done.

The principal speaker of the evening was a man named Michael Lacy, who was not in the habit of measuring his words nor of confining his expressions to the choicest language. He declared, in as plain English as he knew how to use, that all large employers of labor were robbers; that the mine owners and railroad stockholders were bands of cutthroats, whose earnings ought to be taken from them and distributed among the poor, from whom they had been stolen.

Young Mr. Scarlett felt his cheeks burn. That man was talking about *his father!* He was alleging dishonesty on the part of that revered gentleman, whom everybody—he supposed up to that time—respected, and whom a great State had chosen to represent it in the highest council in the nation! He wanted to rise in his place and demand that the speaker retract his charges, but he felt too agitated to make the attempt.

When the meeting adjourned he left the hall with Mr. Strange, the applause that had greeted the incendiary utterances still ringing in his ears.

"I shall quit going to these meetings if men are permitted to utter such libels!" he exclaimed, as soon as he was out of reach of the crowd. "I wonder some one did not reply to those thrusts at the solid men of the country. There must be level-headed fellows who don't agree with that nonsensical stuff. Employers 'cutthroats and robbers,' indeed! I'd like to know what the poor would do if there were no capitalists to give them work. They couldn't build a railroad or open a mine with

their hands alone. In these times, when there are so many people idle for want of something to do, it is very ungracious to attack enterprising men who are making places for them to earn wages in."

Mr. Strange had no intention of becoming involved in a personal controversy with this young man. He sympathized with the filial feeling that had been aroused as much as he indorsed most of the remarks which provoked it.

"Have you ever read a book called 'Looking Backward?'" he asked, quietly.

It seemed a queer way to meet the point, and Charles Scarlett looked the surprise he felt.

"I have not even heard of it," he answered.

"It hasn't been out long," said Mr. Strange. "I think you'd like it. It has a good many new ideas, or at least ideas put into new form. I've got a copy I'll lend you, if you like, as it isn't sold yet at many of the stores."

Charles listened with contracted brows.

"If the ideas are like Lacy's, I don't want to read it," he said, with an asperity that was foreign to his nature.

"Well, they're not ex-act-ly like them," replied the carpenter; "they present a view of the capital and labor question different from anything I've seen before. You see, Mr. Scarlett, there's been a feeling of antagonism between the classes for a good many years. The capitalists think the laborer wants too much, and the workmen think the rich men pile up their wealth too fast. Now, this book I'm speaking of has a remedy for all this. It proposes to abolish both the employer and the employe."

The millionaire's son looked incredulous.

"The author intends to depopulate the earth?"

"Not at all. He only proposes to destroy private capital, putting all the gains of labor at the disposal of those who earn them."

Charles threw up his head with ill-concealed contempt.

"Pshaw! That's the communistic idea over again! I hope you haven't given your adhesion to such trash as that."

The carpenter saw that his friend was unusually irritable, but he maintained the unruffled attitude that was habitual with him.

"Just read the book and then we can discuss it afterwards," he said, mildly. "I'm sure you'll like it."

"If it's a defender of communism I won't touch it!" was the retort. "I've read all of that I'm going to. There is just one object in all of them, that of dragging humanity down to a common level."

"But *this* book shows how to lift all humanity *up* to a common level," replied Mr. Strange, impressively.

The effect was instantaneous. The entire nature of Charles Scarlett palpitated with joy at the prospect held forth in the words of the artisan.

"If that could be done—" He paused, overcome with the thought. "If that could be done, Mr. Strange, the great problem would indeed be solved. I will go with you to your house and take the book home with me. I am only too anxious to read it. What is the name of its author?"

But the carpenter was obliged to admit that he had forgotten. It was some one of whom he had never heard before. The book had not made any

great sensation yet, but it was sure to do so in time. It was the simplest, most convincing work he had ever read. When his friend had finished it he would like to talk it over with him.

"You must know, Mr. Scarlett," he added, "that ill feeling is growing between the rich and the poor at a frightful rate. I don't say which is the most at fault; probably the blame is nearly equally divided; but there'll be trouble of no small magnitude if something isn't done. Hardly a day passes without the papers giving accounts of strikes and lockouts, accompanied by assaults, calling out of militia, swearing in of extra constables and things of that kind. We've got a country where freedom is supposed to exist and where we ought to expect tranquility, but a guerrilla warfare is being constantly waged. No adequate remedy had been proposed until the appearance of this book; at least, nothing that was presented in an apparently feasible light. We have to take folks as we find them. If all the workingmen were sensible, and if all the rich employers were as honorable and fair as *you* would be—"

The speaker was stopped by a motion on the part of the other.

"You know I dislike compliments," he said. "But, speaking of labor, is it not a fact that most of the discontent is fomented by foreigners who have a natural taste for breeding discord?"

Mr. Strange shook his head slowly.

"They may be the spokesmen," he replied, "but their sentiments are voiced by the others. Nearly all laborers feel that there isn't a fair division."

The representative of wealth lifted his quiet eyes to those of the worker in wood.

"Division!" he echoed. "Why *should* there be a division? That is the basis of the whole trouble, a mistaken idea from first to last. No one will accuse me of lack of sympathy with those who labor, but they have burdened their minds with a false conception. Capital and labor are each entitled to what belongs to them. If I raise a crop on my land, and another man neglects his, what business has he to ask that I divide? Unless he has been ill or met with an accident, he has no claim to what I have accumulated. Put the thing in a simpler form, if you like. Say that you earned twenty-five dollars last week—"

"Sixteen," corrected the matter-of-fact listener.

"Sixteen, then," said Mr. Scarlett, with a slight flush. "Whatever you earned, it is the same. You take your wages and start toward home, when another man, who has not earned anything, stops you and demands that you divide with him. How would you take the proposition, put in that concrete form?"

The carpenter shook his head with a smile.

"It used to be hard to meet such arguments," said he, "but it will be easier when everybody has read 'Looking Backward.' The author has such a wise plan that the old controversies seem a waste of time. Read it, Mr. Scarlett, and then we can discuss these things on an entirely new basis."

His curiosity now being piqued to the utmost, Charles was glad when they reached the carpenter's abode. Though in what was undoubtedly a poor neighborhood—for where else can the mechanic afford to live in New York?—not a quarter of a mile separated it from the gorgeous palaces of million-

aires. The rich man's son climbed the three flights of stairs that led to the box-like apartment occupied by the family, consisting of Mr. Strange, his second wife, his daughter Esther and his son Austin, now in his nineteenth year.

"Here's the book," said the carpenter, taking it from a case where were fifteen or twenty other volumes.

Mr. Scarlett took it in his hand with something like reverence. What if it really should contain a genuine revelation of the way rich and poor might become reconciled to each other!

"I'll read it with care," said he, "and when I have finished it I'll come and see you."

His anxiety to get home, where he could begin the reading that very night, induced Mr. Scarlett to take an early farewell. As he passed down the stairway he found Esther Strange in the lower hall, waiting for him.

"Mr. Scarlett," she said, in a quick breathing way, "can I talk with you a few minutes?"

He answered in the affirmative, at the same time asking why she had not made known her desire before her family.

"I don't want them to know it," she stammered. "I want to talk with you—all alone. There is a little bit of a park not far up the street—you know the one. I want you to go there and let me follow."

He looked at her narrowly. She was well developed for her age, rather pretty, very neat and wholesome. He wondered what she could want, but he said without delay that he would go to the place indicated. As he passed along the street he heard

her following. Arriving at the bare spot of ground which she had designated as a "park," he took a seat on a bench and waited for her.

"No, I don't care to sit down," she said, as he made a place for her by his side. "I can talk better standing. It is this, Mr. Charles: I want you to find me a way to *do* something, to *be* something, to get a *chance* in the world. My father is a carpenter. He always was a carpenter; he always will be one. My brother Austin works with the same kind of tools. My stepmother used to be in a shop, before she was married, and she thinks that is the place for me. But I hate shops. I see girls no more intelligent than I am, getting a—a *place*. You can help me out of this —this low life I was born in. You can do it, and I don't know any one else that can."

She had spoken with the utmost rapidity, but he had comprehended it all, as far as the words went.

"I don't understand exactly what you expect me to do," he answered, gravely.

"Don't you?" She seemed considerably disappointed. "I don't see how I can make it plainer. You know how poor we are. Father is a mechanic. Mechanics never amount to anything. We live in four rooms, crowded in with twenty other families. It is expected that the children of such people will do something to earn money as soon as they get big enough. What can *I* do? Go into a shop or a store, or sew or scrub or learn to cook? I *hate* all of those things! I *won't* do any of them, no matter if I starve to death. There are people who don't feel as I do about such matters. As for me, I simply won't. Now, there are girls who are highly educated, who have pleasant employments, who wear good clothes,

who go to the theatres and ride in carriages. Why cannot I be one of those girls ?"

The pleading voice affected him, for he was not inclined to smile at her excessive innocence.

"Have you ever spoken of this to your parents ?" he inquired.

"Of course not !" The girl's dark eyes snapped. "Father talks a great deal about the 'dignity of labor,' and Austin drinks in everything he says as if it was inspired. I am the only one of them who *wants* a change. What kind of a life have I got to live, unless I get out of their circle ? Girls in my class are Nobodies. When they are older they marry Nobodies. They become the mothers of Nobodies ; and so it goes on. Mr. Charles," she continued, impressively, "I won't endure this ! I shall be Somebody, or I shall throw myself into the East River."

The affair was growing serious enough, in all conscience. What a very wicked girl she was ! He must think this over by himself before he could decide what to say to her.

"You surprise me so that I cannot answer you to-night," was his reply, after a moment of hesitation. "You have a father and mother who love you very dearly, and I am sure you will hesitate before doing anything to cause them pain. I will try to think of some way to aid you, if you will give me a few days ; and, in the meantime—"

He had put his hand in his pocket and half-drawn out his purse, when she stopped him.

"You know I did not mean *that !* I don't want charity. I want a *chance*, the same as others have. You can get it for me if you will !"

The girl turned abruptly away and walked off in

the direction of her habitation, leaving Mr. Scarlett still more shocked and astonished. She was a most remarkable child! He would think her case over to-morrow. To-night he was too anxious to read the book her father had put into his hand.

Though ordinarily one of the most regular of sleepers the young scion of wealth did not close his eyes that night. He read every line of the wonderful story that since that day has revolutionized the thoughts and quickened the consciences of millions. The carpenter was right when he said it would alter all bases for argument afterward.

Charles Scarlett was not certain how much of the author's position he accepted, as he sought his couch when the sun was rising. But he knew that something had touched his mind and heart in a way they never had been touched before.

CHAPTER V.

"MARRIAGE IS A NUISANCE."

Though Douglass Maybury saw a great deal of the Scarletts, father and daughter, during the latter part of his stay in Europe, they did not interest him half as much as some other things with which he came in contact there. He was now twenty-one, in the full flush of youthful health, with enough money to spend, rather good-looking, and with no one to put the least curb on his actions. It is no wonder that he found acquaintances more agreeable

than the bonanza Senator, whose talk was largely of politics and stocks ; or the young miss of seventeen, still under the tutelage of her music and language masters, and with as little knowledge of Life as one of the finches that adorned her chamber.

Mr. Scarlett happened to spend considerable time at Paris, when Douglass was there, and also at various points in the south of France and in Italy, during the winter, when the young man was doing the usual places. He invited him to his table at the various hotels, and the invitations were accepted not infrequently. At dinner Miss Flora had her seat by her father, and listened to the conversations that took place, with the well-bred silence of her age. She was undoubtedly a sweet girl, trained by her careful chaperone, Madame Saccard, educated in the best manner, and growing fairer, if possible, every day.

But Maybury, in his own words, "had no use for her." She was still a child, and he was fonder of the company he could find after eleven at night, frequenting the cafés and ready to indulge in wine suppers or games of cards. He made the acquaintance of the fastest set of women wherever he went as naturally as a duck goes into the water, and long before he returned to the United States he was blasé as a man of fifty, his appetite cloyed by the sweet things that had been presented to his pampered taste. He had, indeed, come to regard existence as a bore, and had at times serious thoughts of disposing of it as a disagreeable and monotonous legacy.

From that long past day when a housemaid at his father's had surrendered to his boyish arts, as he then believed, (or deliberately "laid for him," as he

afterwards decided to be the case) he had been a favorite of the god Cupid. A more serious matter was the fondness he had conceived for Bacchus, who frequently now beguiled him into inebriety. Such things cannot be concealed, and it was said in New York, soon after his return, "Young Maybury is drinking too much." However, violations of social rules are condoned in a young gentleman of "blood" and fashion, and the knowledge that he was a trifle fast did not prevent scores of managing mammas from making a dead set at him in the interest of their daughters.

He soon discovered that he was considered a great catch by many families who, having made money, wished to ally themselves with one of the oldest and most distinguished families of the State. The fact that he had very little wealth was no drawback in the estimation of these people. It rather enhanced his value. He could furnish the "family" and they the cash. Surely it was a bargain that is consummated daily, and with great pleasure and profit to both sides.

Mr. Maybury, in spite of his faults, of which the reader already knows the chief, was not a bad fellow. He had generous streaks in him, for one thing, and had he been as rich as many of those with whom he associated, would have spent his money as freely as water.

Another thing marked him. He was in the habit of paying all bills he contracted, and would never make a tradesman or a landlord come to him the second time for what was due. He stuck to this rule even at the risk of appearing a little out of style.

And still another: Though his mistresses had been numerous, he was incapable of any of those cold-blooded acts of villainy toward women which every man of the world knows are altogether too common. He was simply a product of his environment, mitigated by whatever of high tone he had inherited from the Governor and the Judge. He ate and drank with publicans and sinners merely because the brightest laughter, the best food and the daintiest wines were to be found in that company.

Mr. David Bayley, the Architect, had lately lit upon a commission that was to make his fortune. The bonanza Senator, Augustus Scarlett, pleased with something of Mr. Bayley's which he had seen, had given him carte blanche to draw the plans and superintend the erection of a colossal mansion for him at the corner of Fifth avenue and —th street. This meant not only a large percentage on the cost of a building that was to be expensive beyond anything yet known on that royal road, but a sure position afterward for the successful architect.

Mr. Bayley and Mr. Scarlett soon found themselves well mated. The plans which came from the Architect's office delighted the millionaire so much that he began to consider Mr. Bayley an extraordinary mortal. In an incredibly short time these men, so wide apart in wealth and social standing, were extremely intimate. The Architect came to enjoy the confidence of his employer in a much greater degree than any other person.

Strange as this may seem, the case is not without its parallel, which the reader will readily recall. It was the rich widow of a California railroad king who married the architect whose plans for her various

palatial homes pleased her so well, and at her death left the lucky fellow all her fortune.

Mr. Bayley was a man of great shrewdness. He learned the idiosyncracies of the Senator and catered to them in every possible way. A month after he became personally acquainted with him, he would as soon have cut out his tongue as to discuss that gentleman's affairs in the flippant and reckless way he had used with Douglass Maybury. Even at that early date he foresaw the position that he was ultimately to occupy. It was no light thing to be in the full confidence of a man of such wealth as Senator Scarlett. It meant prestige, advancement, everything desirable to David Bayley, hitherto only a young man of fair position.

Exactly how the Senator and his architect came to bring the name of Miss Flora into their conversation it would perhaps be difficult to say at this late date. Mr. Scarlett may have mentioned meeting Mr. Maybury abroad, and Bayley may have said that he was well acquainted with the young gentleman and belonged to a club with him. Certain it is that the Senator told his now close friend that he had a very high opinion of the Maybury family, and that if his daughter ever married he hoped it might be with some gentleman of that description. The heads of these two men were soon together on this proposition. Mr. Bayley wholly agreed with his employer that Mr. Maybury was a most desirable marriage possibility and that a union of the young couple—some day in the future—would be a most happy and desirable one for all concerned. Indeed, it is not overstating the case to say that Douglass was in effect a part of the finish that Mr. Bayley contracted

to put into the new mansion on Fifth avenue when it was completed.

It was not the wish of Mr. Scarlett that anything should be done to hasten his daughter's marriage. She was now barely eighteen and had never given the slightest indication that her thoughts ran in that direction. He only wished to see a friendship growing up between the young people that would find its fruition at the proper time. He learned from Mr. Bayley that Douglass paid little attention to ladies of his own social rank, and he believed that whatever alliances he might make with those on another scale were likely to be temporary. He knew in a general way that the young man drank rather more than was good for him, but in this he did not differ remarkably from the average of his set.

The Senator invited Maybury to dinner much oftener than the invitations were accepted; but a reason that seemed quite sufficient was always forthcoming. And on the days when he accepted Douglass got along very well with Miss Flora, though the Senator noticed that he was given to blushing when his eyes met hers with anything like directness.

The girl's mind was so exceedingly innocent that she neither noticed this fact nor gave any answering color. That Maybury flushed was certainly not a bad sign under such circumstances. Mr. Scarlett thought he could guarantee a satisfactory outcome of the matter, and he was correspondingly contented.

So guardedly was this siege begun, that it was some time before the object of it had his suspicions aroused. Mr. Bayley used to allude, as if at random, to the colossal fortune which would one day fall to the Senator's daughter, which he estimated was not

likely to be short of ten millions. He dilated, at various times, on her beauty and grace, declaring that he would be a very happy man who should some day lead her to the altar. Mr. Maybury listened with only a languid interest to a number of these harangues, until it dawned upon him that there was something peculiar in their astonishing frequency.

"I beg your pardon, old fellow," he said one day, while dining at the club, when the Architect made an allusion to the Scarletts in his usual vein. "I don't want to seem impolite, but what interest do you think I can possibly have in that confounded family?"

"Why, I thought you were on very good terms," was the response. "You and the Senator seem extremely friendly."

Maybury yawned.

"But you're rubbing it in, you know. You talk of them every time we get together. It's all right occasionally to get on to the subject, but it loses its attractions after awhile. I've no objections to Scarlett once or twice a week, but you insist on my having him every meal. And it's not only Scarlett, but Miss Scarlett. Say, Dave, what are you up to?"

Thus challenged, Mr. Bayley was driven into making a show of his hand.

"Well, the fact is, my dear Douglass, I have been wondering why the multitudinous charms of Miss Flora have no apparent effect on a young man in your situation. If she hadn't a penny she would be a prize worth winning; but with her setting of gold and precious stones she is beyond anything in New York. You are going to marry by-and-by—you've told me so yourself. What better can you hope for

than such a fortune and such a beauty in one aggregation?"

Mr. Maybury took out a box of cigarettes that a friend had sent him from Mexico. After offering one to Mr. Bayley he lit another and for some moments puffed lazily.

"I half suspected that was your game," he said, finally. "Is the old gentleman in it, too?"

"It's not fair to speak of it in that way," was the reply, delivered in an injured tone. "I'd do anything I could for you, but in this case my intervention would be of no account. All I can say is, Mr. Scarlett likes you better than any other young man he knows, and in my opinion would not stand in your way if Miss Flora smiled upon your advances."

Mr. Maybury looked as if there was an element of humor in the whole affair, and drew a few draughts from a glass that stood on the table at his side.

"I've got lots of time yet," said he, wiping his lips. "A man out on bail doesn't like to surrender till the court day arrives."

The Architect took what advantage he could of the reply. He remarked that there was, of course, no need for haste on either side. Miss Scarlett was no more likely to think of an immediate marriage than Mr. Maybury.

"It's worth while putting in a foundation, though," he added.

Maybury laughed again, still with the bored look on his handsome face.

"Oh, now you're talking shop!" he said.

"Well, it's not so unlike," replied the Architect. "Look at that house I'm putting up for the Senator. From start to finish it will take three years to build.

It ought to require just about that for you to get to the point of wedding Miss Flora. In three years she will be twenty-one. Allow the first year for an understanding to grow up, the second for an announcement of the engagement, and the third for the actual preparations. Of course, a year cut from the total would not spoil things any, if you should conclude that it was advisable."

The younger man lit a cigarette and sipped again from the tumbler.

"You architects," said he, "get to allowing altogether too much time for preliminaries. I begin to believe Scarlett has this very thing in his head. I can't go there without hearing something dropped that shows it. So your first year—the one to be devoted to getting up an 'understanding'—is disposed of to begin with. Even allowing that I looked on Miss Flora as a possible end to my bachelorhood, there would be twelve good months left to me, by your own calculation. It is said that an hour's sleep before midnight is worth two afterward. On the same basis, a year of single life ought to be more interesting than five of wedlock."

Mr. Bayley paid the customary tribute to the wit of his companion.

"Much you know about sleep before midnight," he added, "and as little, very naturally, about the married state."

"I know marriage is a nuisance, even if I haven't tried it," was the answer. "The concerted contemporary evidence is enough to show that. A Frenchman once told me it was more agreeable to kiss the wives of other men, than to keep a wife for other men to kiss. It must be a trial for a born poacher

to find himself in possession of a game preserve, which he must watch between expeditions. I know men whose time is equally divided between looking after their own daughters and attempting liberties with other people's. No wonder their hair is growing gray under the strain. Then, children are such an unmitigated curse! And one lays himself open to such inflictions when he enters the married state."

"More than when he keeps a mistress?" asked Mr. Bayley, meaningly.

"Oh, that's ridiculous!" was the impatient rejoiner.

The Architect gazed at his companion in silence for a little while. He wanted to utter his wisest thoughts now this matter was fairly opened.

"There is no need of haste," he said, finally. "I am quite intimate at the Scarletts, and I shall know if there is a chance of another's getting a foothold, so that I can keep you posted."

"Thanks, awfully," drawled Maybury, with mock politeness.

"There was the Duke of Applehurst," proceeded the Architect, ignoring the irony. "And there was the Prince of Pisa. Both of them made formal propositions for Miss Flora's hand, not to mention a score of others of less exalted rank. In fact, the proposals have averaged about one a month. Now, as your particular friend, I admit having kept my eyes open for some weeks back, and, with the exception of yourself, no one has had the least encouragement."

Maybury threw down the remains of his cigarette.

"Don't except me," he said. "I haven't had any, either."

An incredulous look spread over the face of the Architect.

"What did you just say about the Senator's—"

"The Senator! I mean the young lady."

Mr. Bayley wondered how much his friend was in earnest.

"Do you expect a girl like her is going to throw herself at your head?" he demanded. "Would you respect her the more if she did? Miss Flora is a girl in a million. She is the most self-contained person of her age I ever met. She looks to her father to advise her in such a matter. It is a principle with him never to issue an order to either of his children, and he would not utter a word of dissent, I am sure—no, not even if she selected for her husband that young carpenter in whom she has appeared so interested of late."

Mr. Maybury had found something at last to entertain him. He sat upright in his chair and asked for further particulars.

"About the carpenter?" said Mr. Bayley. "I was only using him as an extreme illustration."

"But I want to know about him," was the quick answer. "You say she has appeared interested in him. In what way?"

The Architect hemmed softly.

"Why, he has been at work on the new house; and whenever Miss Flora has been there, she has spent most of her time at his bench watching him at his carving. The reason she watches him instead of the others, I think, is because he seldom looks up or speaks."

"And the name of this happily distinguished

youth?" asked Maybury, in a slightly disturbed tone.

"I believe they call him Austin Strange."

The younger man turned his face away, under the pretense of believing that some one was entering the door.

"Is there anything noticeable about the boy?" he asked, presently.

"No," said Bayley. "He's merely a good workman, who tends to his business and only speaks when addressed. His father is also a carpenter, but the lad already does the finer work."

Again Maybury turned toward the door; but there was no one entering or about to enter.

"I think I've heard of that carpenter," he said, quietly. "Is his christened name Martin?"

"No; Lyman."

This time the young man rose and walked to the end of the room, where he could see into the billiard hall.

"I thought I heard Parton come in," he said, in explanation. "I've had a headache mornings lately, and he has something that stops it."

"I could prescribe for that," replied the Architect, jocosely.

"Yes, but your remedies are too drastic; they would include going to bed sober, which would ruin my constitution." He took out his watch. "I must leave you now, my dear fellow, as I have an important engagement at five."

Mr. Bayley inquired pleasantly if it was one of the usual kind.

"Oh, dear, no! It is a matter of pure business, worse luck. And about that Scarlett affair, I'll

think of it. But not for a long time, a very long time, will I give up my freedom."

"There's nobody else on your list," said the Architect, interrogatively.

"You may rest easy on that score. Perhaps, if she waits long enough, in fact till it's either marriage or starvation, I may come to it."

The Architect pursed up his mouth.

"You can't deny she's a very nice girl," he said.

"No, indeed!" said Maybury, soberly. "She is the only girl I ever saw that I would marry, in any event."

With this parting assertion Mr. Bayley was forced to be content for the time. He thought on the whole he had made some progress, and he reported as much of the conversation as he thought wise to Mr. Scarlett that evening.

But Maybury was thinking of pretty Esther Strange, and wondering if two years had heightened her beauty or brought her new ideas in connection with the problems of life.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE WOULD BE A LADY.

Charles Scarlett was considerably upset by the way in which the daughter of his friend, the carpenter, had appealed to him. Could he have satisfied her by taking out a few hundred dollars and providing for her improved education, he would have done so, and relieved himself of a continual annoyance;

for she met him at all sorts of corners, and asked him daily what he was going to do to make a lady of her, and when he was going to begin. Charles had a natural fear of women, and, young as she was, Esther seemed to be included in that category. The girl insisted that he must on no account inform her father, and, above all, her stepmother, of the ideas which she held. It was plain that she looked down on all of her family, as upon people who were not of her rank, and whose opinion was not of the least consequence. Study the case in whatever light he could, it became no clearer.

She used to dog his steps, when from very terror of meeting her he ceased to call at her father's, and demand his reasons for delaying so long in granting the simple request she had made him. She had no scheme of her own, she left that to him with a contemptuous wave of her little hand. He knew more of the world than she—it was for him to arrange particulars. She was willing to take the station of a young lady whenever he was ready to have her. And she would do nothing but insist on that point, every time she could get a conversation with him

As her father and brother both worked on the new mansion of the Senator's, she made that a favorite place of lying in wait for the unhappy young gentleman. One day Douglass Maybury happened to come along just as Esther was leaving Charles, at the corner of the avenue. The girl would inevitably have seen him had she turned her head, but she was in a fit of temper because Mr. Scarlett, Jr., was still "unreasonable," and she was sailing toward her home, looking neither to the right nor the left. Douglass recognized her instantly, but he did not

think of following her. Seeing that she was known to Charles, he preferred to see what he had to say about her.

"That girl acts rather queer," he remarked, gazing after the retreating figure. "She looks as if you had done her some kind of an injury."

"She's the queerest girl I ever saw," replied Charles, drawing a long breath.

Then he told Douglass all about her, how she had proposed to him to remedy the ills of Fate, and had followed him up about it until existence had almost ceased to be a pleasure.

"But that's the sort of thing I have always understood you delighted in," smiled the other. "You couldn't find a better chance for a good deed than to take this child and do what she asks."

Charley looked at his companion helplessly.

"But *how!*" he exclaimed. "She's got a father—that carpenter there, at the bench—and she won't have him consulted; she's got a stepmother, with whom she doesn't get along any too well; and a brother as little like her as oil is like water, the young fellow you see in the next room, carving that moulding."

"Which makes it all the easier," insisted Maybury. "They would probably give her up to you without a word of reluctance. You really should try your hand on her, my dear fellow."

This did not make Mr. Scarlett any better satisfied in relation to his duty, and the only thing he did about Miss Strange for the next month was to be very careful not to let her see him. Hiding in the shadows of an adjacent doorway, Esther's eyes met one day a sight that pleased her quite as well.

She saw the face of Mr. Maybury entering the Scarlett building, and presently emerging therefrom. But,—bad luck was in it!—she could not go up and speak to him, for he was in the company of another gentleman, Mr. Bayley, the Architect, whose figure she knew by sight. However, it was something to know that this friend was again in the city, for she would be sure to get news of him at his former home. Before the next evening she had visited those lodgings and ascertained to her joy that Mr. Maybury had resumed the occupancy of his old chambers.

A little note, written in a childish hand, which showed a total absence of cultivation, came on the following morning to inform Mr. Maybury that, like the Indians of America, he had "been discovered." It announced that he had been seen in Mr. Bayley's company, which prevented her from speaking to him at the time, as she very much wanted to do. The note was signed "E. S.," and bore a postscript setting as the time when she would call five o'clock that very afternoon.

"Preposterous!" the young man exclaimed for the twentieth time, as he laid down the letter, after reading and re-reading it. "There is but one way that a poor girl can get ease and luxury, and it is evident that thought never entered her pretty head. What a ridiculous life this is, anyway!"

All day he was preoccupied and his friends asked him what was the matter. He could think of nothing but the little visitor who was coming in the early evening to propound a question that nobody in the world could answer.

When at last he came into the parlor, where his

valet told him she was waiting, he found the old, business-like look on her face. She gave him her hand, rising to do so, and then resumed her seat. Had she come merely to ask him to write his name in her album, she could not have acted much differently.

She was older, though. Yes, a good deal older. Less than three years had passed, but she looked a good deal taller and rounder. And she was prettier, too. She was much better worth his attention from a physical standpoint than on that morning when he accosted her on the sidewalk, near Fourth avenue.

"Well, young Miss Giddy," he said, devouring her with his handsome eyes. "What is it this time?"

Esther's face took on a look of disappointment.

"You haven't forgotten all I said before; and you must have read my letter."

"Every word."

"Well, then, you know all about it."

He bowed pleasantly.

"In brief," said he, "you are still tired of being the daughter of a carpenter and want to be a lady."

Esther relaxed her features a little as she indicated that he had correctly diagnosed the situation.

"And the question, still open for debate," added Maybury, slowly, "is—how?"

Again Esther nodded her agreement with his statement.

"Which," continued Douglass, "is as much as ever a rather difficult problem to solve."

The girl uttered an impatient sound, which she evidently would have preferred to restrain.

"Now," said Mr. Maybury, "the great requisite in being a lady is to have plenty of money. With

that you will readily agree. How are we to find a supply of cash to fit a case like this? If we can get over that difficulty, we shall make a substantial start on our road."

The girl choked down her indignation, which this suggestion called forth.

"I have talked a good deal to young Mr. Scarlett," she said. "His father is so rich that people say he can't even count his money. I don't need as much as he's got—only a very little part of it—but Mr. Charles won't say a word to him for me, and the only answer I get is a long breath and a casting down of the eyes."

Mr. Maybury looked thoughtful at this statement.

"Did you ever think," he asked, "that there might be something disagreeable in connection with this matter—that some of the money might have been got in a way Mr. Charles did not like to talk about?"

Esther seemed unable to fully appreciate this point.

"I never thought there *could* be anything disagreeable in the getting of money," she replied, with naïvetté.

This brought a very broad smile to the face of her companion.

"That's not bad!" he cried. "Gad! you're nearly right, too! But the fact is, my little girl, there are ways of getting rich which the people who make use of do not discuss much before others. And really, the very nicest thing, the more one thinks of it, is to inherit your money. Then you are not compelled to go too deep into the merits of your ancestors' transactions."

These expressions puzzled the girl a little, but she gained a general idea of Mr. Maybury's meaning.

"Here is something I have thought of," she said. "There must be people who have a great deal of money, and no children of their own. If some of them knew of me—perhaps if they could hear how much I would like to be rich—they would leave me their property when they die."

The young man ruminated for some seconds over this proposition.

"I wish *I* had enough to make it an object," he answered, presently. "I would write a will leaving it all to you, with the greatest pleasure in the world. And I wouldn't keep you waiting long for it, either," he added, in a lower tone. "To tell the truth, I am about as sick of this life as a man can be and endure it."

The girl observed him wonderingly.

"*You* tired of life!" she repeated, with a rising inflection. "Tired of life! With such a house as this to live in! With plenty of good clothes, servants, everything!"

It was his mood to confide in this child and he reiterated his confession.

"Tired of it as I can be!" he said. "I eat, to be sure; I drink, without doubt; I sleep, of a certainty; and when I have eaten and drunk and slept, of what use is it all? Tell me that, wise little woman."

She clasped her hands behind her head and leaned back in the chair she occupied.

"It would be enough for me," said she, "to eat as you do, and to sleep where you can, and to ride in a carriage like you, and to have always—never missing—money in my pocket. Oh, I have thought

of it a very great deal! It would be so different from living in a boxed-up flat, with such dresses as this, and with never a penny that had not been spoken for by the baker or the landlord. It would make me very happy! And the time will come when I shall have it, yes, the time *must* come; I will find a way to bring it about."

The young face was so lighted up with the fervor of her thoughts that it was for the moment absolutely beautiful, and Douglass Maybury gazed on it with a feeling akin to awe.

"How much better other's circumstances appear always than our own," he replied. "I was watching your brother, yesterday, at his work, with feelings of positive envy. There, I said, is a young man, content with his labor, getting all of life that he expects and desires. He has a place of usefulness; he is doing something to help along the work of the world, while I am doing nothing."

The girl interrupted him with a warm expression.

"Oh! that must be very pleasant—doing nothing! It is exactly what I long for; a life in which there is nothing to do, nothing whatever!"

"And you think that would content you?"

"I am sure of it!"

For the first time it struck Douglass Maybury that he might do something for this child. Her ideas of the grandeur of wealth were not very exalted, probably. He could assist her to remove from the condition into which she had been born without infringing very greatly on the income which he had planned to exhaust in the next three or four years. It would be a great thing to make one human being perfectly happy. There did not

occur to him at first any feasible plan to accomplish his idea, but the outline of the possibility came into his mind.

"You spoke of some one who had no children and who might leave you property," he said, in a guarded way. "If I should hear of such a man, how much do you think you would need?"

With the directness of absolute trust Esther began a mental computation. In the midst of it she stopped for a question.

"Do you mean right out, or by the year?"

"Well, let us say by the year."

After a few moments of study she was compelled to give up naming an exact figure.

"You can tell as well as I," she said, lamely. "I should want enough for a nice set of rooms—like these—and plenty of good clothes, and two or three servants. Yes, and a carriage, and—and—money to fill my pocket-book whenever it got empty."

"A very good list," he smiled. "But haven't you forgotten a most important circumstance? You are rather young to set up an establishment yet. Wouldn't you think it wise to go for a year or two to some college where you could finish your education. A lady without a good education is rather out of place, in these days."

Esther assented, without enthusiasm.

"If it was necessary, I would go to school," she said, "and get my house afterward. But I could have a carriage to ride in, couldn't I, while I was getting educated?"

"I should think, during that period," he replied, gravely, "that public cabs might be made to answer."

The girl thought this over, recalling the appearance of the cabs she had seen, and then responded that an open cab, for summer use, and a closed one for winter, would be acceptable.

"Supposing I am able to arrange these things," said Maybury, slowly, "how are you going to fix it with your father?"

"I should just tell him I was going," was the calm reply.

"Do you think he would raise no objection?"

"If he did, I should go without his consent. He can do nothing for me. If I got a chance to help myself I should be very silly to let him stand in my way."

What a very odd girl she was!

"Well," said Douglass, meditatively, "I will look about and see if anything can be done for you. If I succeed, and you get sent to a nice school for young ladies, you will have to study hard. And when you are fully established and get a little older, perhaps I can find a husband for you."

He thought this amusing and supposed she would respond to the smile with which he made it, but she took it with complete seriousness.

"You are very kind," she said.

"You would be willing to be married?"

"Oh, yes, I should want to!"

This reply came very near taking his breath away.

"I wish I liked marriage as well as that," said he, with a grimace. "I suppose I shall have to go though in a few years and it gives me a pain every time I think about it. You see, I am not so rich as you take me to be, and I must marry some girl who has a great deal of money."

Then Esther, grateful for the interest he had shown in her, came to his rescue.

"*I* would marry you, if I got money enough," she said, soberly.

He started to his feet.

"Would you! I'm afraid I shall need more than you will have to offer."

After a few minutes more, Esther looked at the clock and said she must go home, or her absence would attract notice. Maybury promised to see what he could do and to let her know as early as possible. Then, with the simplest of "Good-by's," she took her departure.

How refreshingly naïve she was! What a pity she should be doomed to seclusion in the box-like flat where the carpenter's family lived! *Could* he do anything for her? These were the thoughts that ran through Maybury's mind during the next two hours.

He *could* do something, if he liked. The girl's idea of wealth was so simple, it would take but little to satisfy her wants. A boarding-school in the country, what clothes she would need, carte blanche at a cab-stand and her pin-money, would hardly exceed his cigar and liquor bill. It could all be arranged through a third party, pretending to represent some benevolent lady or gentleman, who had heard of the family and wished to do something for Esther. Douglass wished he had the right party to consult with, but he had only one friend in whom he confided, and that was David Bayley. He could not tell this to the Architect, with whom he had talked of that more serious matter—a possible marriage with Miss Flora Scarlett.

Then there was Dr. Parton. Douglass liked Parton and would have told him of many things, but not this one. It was a peculiar idea, that Parton might not take in the right spirit. No, if he did it at all, it must be through the mediumship of a lawyer.

And that is just what he did do; he went to see Mr. Blackstone Coke, who did not make half as much fuss about it as Maybury imagined he would. And before a fortnight elapsed Esther Strange was taken into the little room that her people called a parlor, and set face to face with a gray-haired man in gold-rimmed spectacles, who had come with a generous and noble offer from a generous and noble personage, whose name was not to be disclosed at present.

There was little hesitation on the part of Lyman Strange in accepting this proposition. He had long wondered what would become of his peculiar daughter, who hated the commonest labor about the house, and who said, with something not distantly resembling temper, that she never, *never*, NEVER would go out to work in any shop or factory. Austin, when he heard of it, tossed his head in a way that might mean almost anything except that he cared one way or the other. It was Mrs. Strange, the stepmother, accustomed to the ordinary things of life, and fearful of all that was out of the range of her limited experience, who cried when Esther said she would be ready at the end of the week to go with the gentleman.

And, when the time came, Esther went with the gold-bowed glasses and with the man who wore them. Charles Scarlett had been consulted, and had looked up the lawyer, and found that he belonged

to a great firm in the city, whose reputation was very high indeed.

"Your fortune has come to you sooner than you expected," said Charles, pleasantly to Esther.

"And you did not think it would ever come at all!" she responded, half-spitefully.

She went to see Mr. Maybury and told him of her good luck, but he didn't act much interested. She said she would write to him every day, but he responded, with an expression of comic fear, that she must do nothing of the kind. Unless something extraordinary furnished a reason she must only write once a quarter.

"The best thing is to have as little as possible to do with her," he said, convincingly, to himself, as from a place behind the shutters he watched her leave the house.

CHAPTER VII.

FIFTEEN MILLION DOLLARS.

The palatial building was at last said, by Mr. Bayley, to be "approaching completion." According to the same unimpeachable authority it had been "approaching completion" for the past year and a half, so there was no undue elation on the part of the owner and prospective occupier of the edifice. Such a residence could not be built in a day, any more than the city of Rome. It was no common affair, to

be run up in a single season. On the finest avenue in the first city of the land, it was destined to surpass all of its neighbors, and leave a liberal distance between itself and any likely to come after.

That meant a scouring of half the world for materials, a securing of the best workmen in every department, and above all no sign of haste anywhere.

It required ten months to bring the building to the height of the first floor, to the amazement of the neighborhood, which was not prepared for the elaboration extended to those parts of the work that were soon to be hidden from sight. Then the superstructure rose slowly, that the fine cut stone might have an opportunity to settle the fraction of an inch that it needed, instead of taking that liberty when it could drag with it the wood and plaster of the interior. And when the edifice was to the inexperienced eye of the passer nearly done, there were eighteen months still to wait before the furnishers could be allowed to enter and garb this naked creature. It was not finished yet, by any means. It was only "approaching completion."

Charles Scarlett came to see it often. The very grandeur of this building, which had pleased the millionaire's son greatly as he looked over the plans with his father, distressed him as it came into collision with the new ideas that filled his mind. Had any single family a right to arrogate to themselves all that treasure of stone and wood and metal? Should not such an edifice be devoted to the general welfare instead of the selfish interests of three persons? The matter preyed upon him, and one day, when he was in the new house, with his father and

sister, he mustered courage to say what he had kept to himself so long.

"Well, Charles, have you any suggestions or criticisms to make?" asked the Senator, gayly, as he took his son by the arm and walked to the street end of the unfinished drawing-room.

"Not about the beauty of the design or the excellence of the work, father," responded Charles, with a great effort. "But it seems to me sometimes that all this magnificence should be devoted to a wider use than that of one little group of people."

The Senator laughed.

"There is no reason why it should not serve for three groups," he answered. "You and May will get married one of these days; and then, with your wife and May's husband, and the babies that will follow, and their nurses, the place will come nearer, I trust, to your conception of what it is fit for."

The son did not join in the humor, nor did his face relax its earnest expression.

"It isn't that," he answered, respectfully. "It would be, even then, a monument to our individual selfishness. Oh, father," he burst out, in a despairing tone, "there is so much that I want to say to you, and the subject is so deep, that I feel unequal to it! There is a book which, if you would only read—the name—"

"Is 'Looking Backward!'" interrupted the Senator, quietly.

Charles stared at his father with the utmost astonishment.

"You have not read it!" he gasped.

"Oh, yes, I have," smiled the Senator. "I read everything that attracts the attention of thinkers. I

will admit, also, that I consider it one of the ablest expositions of the Socialistic theory, and add that I differ from the author in but one important particular."

Charles looked the inquiry he did not put into words, and the father continued, after a slight pause—

"That of Expediency."

For a few seconds the millionaire waited in the apparent expectation that his son would have a reply ready, but Charles did not speak. He thought that perhaps this very wise man might after all be able to overthrow the doctrines which had impressed him so deeply.

"This Socialistic wave, that ebbs and flows like those of the tide," continued the other, "has given great apprehension to many people of comfortable fortunes, but it gives none to me. Whenever the people, spoken of in the aggregate, wish a decided change in the economic conditions of government, they have the means within their grasp to bring it about. Up to date they have shown only sporadic movements in this direction, and even these have been confined to a very small fraction of the persons most deeply interested. This man Bellamy is the least objectionable to me of the whole lot. He at least proposes to give us a shelter, after taking the ground from under our feet and the roof from over our heads."

Charles Scarlett felt more than ever how little fitted he was to cope with the experience and wisdom of his father. But he did not expect to do much more than get an opening at this time for a future discussion; and he was pleased to find that the kindness of manner and tone, which he had never

known to vary, continued in the presence of a subject he had feared would be extraordinarily distasteful.

"I am glad to hear you speak so kindly, father," he replied. "You have always given me such full liberty, that I dread doing anything to offend you. I want you to know, however, that I am much impressed by Mr. Bellamy's theories, and by the gentleman himself. For I have been to Boston on purpose to meet him, and have returned more convinced than before that he is in the right."

The Senator laughed again, this time with more heartiness than before.

"It is rather late, my boy," said he, "for you and me to discuss the question you seem determined, in your supreme conscientiousness, to raise. I have but one rule for you and your sister. That rule is condensed into the brief sentence, 'Do as you please.' It is short and comprehensive, is it not? If you come to me for advice, I shall try and give it, to the best of my ability; otherwise, you must be your own guide in all things."

The sober face of the young man grew yet more earnest as he listened.

"I am sure I want but one thing—to do what is Right," he said.

"Pardon me for suggesting a better guide," replied the Senator. "You should do what is most Expedient."

Charles looked into his father's face and asked, "Do you think so?" in a hushed tone.

"I am sure of it. To come to the matter that is in your mind, it might be *right* for me to use the whole of my fortune to establish homes and hospi-

tals for the poor. That it would be *expedient* I very much question."

"Still, you have allowed me to spend as much as I pleased in that direction."

"Not exactly. I have made you an allowance of $300 a week. To that extent you are at liberty to do what you like; but it is a very small part of my income."

Charles looked at his sister, who was watching young Austin Strange at the other end of the room, engaged in work upon a piece of dado. Austin seemed intent on his occupation and did not look up at the girl in replying to the questions which she occasionally put to him. Flora had known the carpenter's son for some months, having been introduced to him by her brother, and Charles was much pleased to see the total absence of any line of social distinction in his sister's manner.

There was never anything aristocratic in the bearing of this girl, though she had a quiet dignity that never left her and that made her appear older than she was. The servants in her father's employ fairly idolized her. Every workman on the big building where she expected some day to reside, grew brighter of face as she came within the range of his vision.

Austin was now twenty. He was of athletic build, straight and well-made, with brawny arms, on which the sleeves were rolled up as he worked. The presence of this girl, so far above him, as it must seem even to a disciple of Modern Socialism, made him more silent than usual. This was all very natural. Miss Scarlett had fluttered the nerves of her equals before now, and made them

forget the sentences they had meant to utter. What wonder that the son of a carpenter cast down his eyes and silenced his tongue in her presence?

"You were very poor once, were you not?" asked Charles of his father, dreamily.

"Poorer than you can imagine," was the straightforward answer.

"And how did you become so rich?"

"By taking advantage of my Opportunities. It is easy enough, in this country. There is just so much wealth floating about. The man who devotes himself to its acquisition can get it. Many who spend their time grumbling over their lot could do as well, if they tried."

Charles was astonished at this statement, which seemed incredible, or would have, had it come from any other source.

"How much money do you think you have, father?" he asked, bluntly.

"Fifteen or twenty millions, counting everything at its market value. Whatever there is to-day, it will be larger to-morrow and still larger the next day. Nobody can stop its growth. Two years ago some people thought I was a heavy loser by the labor troubles that spread over the country. For four months trains ran with difficulty on my roads. For a longer period hardly a ton of ore was taken from my mines. The labor leaders combined to crush me, and with what result? They crushed themselves. True, the stock on the X. & Q. road sunk thirty dollars a share; but I bought a hundred thousand shares of it at the reduced figure. The mining stock went begging at thirty and thirty-two,

and when the storm blew over, I had nine-tenths of it in my safe at those prices."

The young man gazed at his father like one fascinated.

"And had you no sympathy for the thousands of laborers who were all that time out of work?" he asked, dragging the sentence as one drags a chain.

"Absolutely none. That autumn they elected a legislature which chose me Senator for the second time. An antagonist must win my respect before he can claim much of my sympathy. Why, look at these workingmen. Almost every one of them has a ballot. If they knew how to use it, we and not they would be suing for mercy. What can I think of an army numbering millions who will let a few hundred of their fellowmen ride over them. We wonder at the facility with which Cortes conquered the Aztec nation. The American laborer permits the same thing with a proportionately smaller array of conquerers."

The son opened his eyes wider.

"Surely you have pity for their misguided condition," said he.

"In a way, yes. I have pity for the beeves, the lambs, the fish that will grace my table; but not enough to prevent my dining. The world seems to me a battle-ground. Those with the most finesse come off victors. To-day it is men like our capitalists who defeat the many. To-morrow the tables may be turned; but I don't believe it."

Charles glanced again at his sister, still watching the young artisan. It gave him time to collect his thoughts.

"The conditions outlined in 'Looking Backward'

cannot be brought about," he said, presently, "except by what you would probably call confiscation of private property in land, mines and railroads. I feel very strongly that I ought to help in speeding that day, and yet in all I may do I shall be placed in a position of antagonism to your business interests."

The laugh with which the Senator greeted this sober declaration was louder than those which preceded it.

"Do what you like, my dear boy," he said, laying his hand on his son's shoulder, patronizingly. "You are as free as if I was not the slightest relation to you. But let me remind you that one result will be to lessen—provided you are successful—the size of the fortune I hope to divide between you and May."

Charles studied the young carpenter over whose work his sister seemed still to bend with interest. Was there such an advantage, after all, in possessing so much money? Was not Austin Strange as happy with his meagre salary as the son of a millionaire? Then he thought of Austin's sister Esther, that peculiar girl who had demanded that he make her a lady.

"Do you think, father," he asked, "that any one person has a real right to control fifteen million dollars?"

"Undoubtedly. The fact that he can get possession of that sum is his guaranty. These things take care of themselves. The proof that a man ought not to have a certain amount of wealth is found when he cannot maintain his hold upon it. For instance, were I to die to-morrow and leave you half my property, you would probably demonstrate that it was a great deal too much for you. You would scatter it

in benefactions which might and might not be of use in the long run. Many men have such a strong desire to see their fortunes conserved after their decease that they make the most elaborate wills, preventing their heirs from spending the principal as long as the laws will permit an entail. I have done nothing of the kind. I have found my money a source of comfort, a barrier against the privations that my parents came near compelling me to endure for life. If my children choose to scatter the whole of it, that will be their affair. I have shown them what it will buy, they have themselves seen how uncomfortable its absence can make people, and the course they take must be governed accordingly."

Charles Scarlett searched in vain, both in the tone and manner of his father, for any indication that more was hidden in these words than appeared on the surface. The Senator had spoken in his usual clear and open style. The young man almost sighed for a parent who would issue commands that he must obey. It was painful sometimes to be permitted to follow his own bent.

"Come, May!" called Mr. Scarlet. "It is time we drove home to lunch."

The girl hesitated a second or two before leaving the young artisan whose work she had been watching so long.

"Good-by," she said to him.

The carpenter's lips moved in reply, but if there was any sound it was a very faint one.

"I would like to see that when it is finished," added Miss Flora. And the young man nodded to show that he understood.

Two or three hours later Austin Strange went to

Mr. Bayley with the piece of wood he had been carving.

"Miss Scarlett wishes to have some one bring this to her house," he said. He spoke with a timid air that did not agree well with his robust figure and healthy complexion. "She wants to see it before it is put in place."

The Architect inspected the wood minutely, and then gave an almost equally close inspection to the young fellow.

"Your name is Austin Strange, I believe?" he said, curtly.

It is the custom of employers the world over to use that tone to those who draw wages from them.

"Yes, sir."

"Lyman Strange is your father?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Bayley looked again at the piece of wood, which seemed to please him, for he smiled affably.

"How long have you worked at the business?"

"Four years."

"Did you do this alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did it very well."

The Architect looked the young man full in the face as he said this, expecting to see something there to show the pleasure of being praised, but there was nothing. The countenance was certainly intelligent, but it maintained a perfect stolidity under a compliment that would have delighted most young artisans.

"What is your age?" was the next question.

"Twenty years."

"You began young."

There was no answer to this remark.

Strange recurred to the wood in his hand.

"Will you see that this is sent to Miss Scarlett?"

"You know where she lives?" asked Mr. Bayley.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you had best take it, yourself."

The carpenter eyed the Architect for the first time.

"I, sir?" he repeated.

"Yes, she may want to say something that you will understand better than any one else."

"Very well," said the unemotional young man, turning away.

CHAPTER VIII.

"DAVE, I AM A DEVIL!"

During the year which followed, Douglass Maybury pursued the sort of life that is usually aptly described as "raising the devil." His career was one of dissipation in the various forms affected by men of fashion, who have nothing of importance to do and feel it necessary to kill time. The habit of drinking to excess grew upon him, until he seldom if ever went to bed sober. He gambled to a mild extent. With women he was the same roué as ever, seeking liason after liason, becoming disgusted with the whole business at least once a week to the extent of solemnly swearing off, and then losing his head if not his heart with the next opportunity to disgrace a foolish girl or a giddy wife. Such was his natural good health, however, that he stood all of these

drains with very little impression upon his handsome countenance, and appeared in the best society, as great a favorite with clubmen and with aspiring mammas as before.

One of the things he tried hardest to do was to keep out of the way of Augustus Scarlett and his daughter. A feeling had been growing in his breast in relation to this girl which made him intensely uneasy in her presence. She was a standing rebuke to his manner of living—this dainty bit of Parian marble—and he felt the hot blushes mantle his cheek every time he was compelled to hold ever so brief a conversation with her. It seemed the thing for his friends on every side to couple their names, and he did not mean to have them do so from any fault of his. He knew himself very well, and he could not think with patience of connecting such a model of innocence with the depraved nature that had grown up in him until he was no longer his own master. If it was the custom to mate such men with such angels, he would prevent society from having its way in this instance.

Maybury knew that there was a concerted action all along the line to secure him, willing or no, no matter how long a time it took to accomplish the object. Miss Flora was the obedient child one reads of in fiction, ready to carry out her father's wishes, believing him the wiser judge as to what was good for her. Being taught, as no doubt she had been, that she would probably be some day the wife of Mr. Maybury, she had accustomed herself to like him, as a matter of duty. But what did she know about it, after all? To girls like her, in the "upper classes," marriage was a complete revelation, not a

single page of which could be even guessed until the wedding-day.

Douglass had declared to himself a thousand times that there was one outrage which he would never perpetrate. That was the betrayal of an entirely innocent girl. With one like Flora Scarlett the crime would be almost equally great, even though the deception practiced was inside the marriage bond.

Do what he might, he could not wholly escape. He went to a great many houses that were also on the Senator's list, and it would never do to show to observant watchers that he was trying to avoid Miss Scarlett. Whenever he found himself in the same parlor he always went to the young girl's side and spoke to her like an ordinary acquaintance, cutting the conversation as short as he could without attracting attention, and generally pleading that other engagements compelled him to leave early. At places like the theatre and opera, when he saw that he was noticed from her box, he went around to say a word about the play, declining the offered seat on account of a party of gentlemen friends below who would expect him to rejoin them. To the daughter he was affable, to her father courteous on all occasions, but it was next to impossible now to get him to dine at their residence, so full of "previous acceptances" did he prove.

Mr. David Bayley had all he could do to persuade the Senator to have patience, declaring that he would almost stake his life on the ultimate success of the plans he was maturing.

Miss Flora accompanied her father often to the mansion on earth which his hired men were preparing

for her delectation. She took a great pleasure in watching the workmen, and especially young Austin Strange, who seemed as of yore quite oblivious of her presence, and continued taciturn, emotionless, industrious. One day, as she was about to leave the premises, she encountered on the steps Mr. Douglass Maybury, who was going in to meet Mr. Bayley, with whom he had an appointment to lunch in a newly-discovered restaurant in the French quarter, glowing accounts of which the Architect had brought him on the previous evening. The young gentleman met the gaze of the girl with heightened color.

"I'm going to take a look at your house, Mr. Scarlett," he said. "It is quite a long time since I was inside."

"You'll notice a slight change, then," smiled the Senator. "It seems to go rather slowly, considering that there are seventy-five men working on it all the time."

Maybury looked for a fraction of a second at the daughter, but his glance fell before the remarkable clearness of her large blue eyes.

"Oh, it takes time," he answered. "Vanderfeldt's house was two years and a half in building, you know."

"And this will cost half a million more," replied Mr. Scarlett, reflectively.

This may sound in cold type like a boast, but it did not seem so when it fell from the Senator's lips. His manner was that of a man who counts millions as other men count simple hundreds of dollars.

"I hope you are well," said Maybury to the young lady.

"I am about as usual, thank you," she said. "You should come to see us oftener, and then you would not have to ask that question."

Maybury blushed again, just enough to tint his exceedingly fair complexion.

"May is right," smiled her father. "The best thing you can do is to jump into the carriage here and go home to lunch with us."

Miss Flora sweetly seconded this suggestion, but Mr. Maybury explained the appointment he had come to keep with Mr. Bayley. There was an evident nervousness in his tone, which did not escape the quick ear of his would-be host.

"Then make it dinner—at seven," said Mr. Scarlett. "There are some things I want to talk over with you. Go in and see the house and come and tell me what you think about it. The last time you inspected it you had some excellent ideas that I put to service."

"You will come?" added the young lady, before he could formulate and utter the words that would have made another declination.

There was no easy avenue of escape for Mr. Maybury. He put the best face he could on the matter, saying he would come to dinner with the greatest of pleasure.

"Er—excuse me—is there to be any one else?" he asked.

"Not a soul. Only we three. Just a nice little family party. It will be as informal as a picnic in the woods."

This was not the answer Mr. Maybury hoped for. Had there been going to be a dozen others he would have liked it better, but he only replied that he

would be punctual, and, as he turned toward the house, he lifted his hat once more to the young lady and blushed as he again encountered her calm expression.

As soon as he entered the unfinished drawing-room, the Architect came from the front window to greet him. Mr. Maybury knew that his friend had probably watched the tableau that had just taken place in front of the house, and that he could be depended upon to say something not acceptable in reference to it. He was consequently prepared with his answers.

"Miss Scarlett looked very pretty to-day," said Mr. Bayley, meaningly.

"Now, Dave," expostulated Mr. Maybury, "don't irritate me, please. I want to see the house, and I don't want to talk about women. What have you been doing in the last three months? If I was the Senator I'd discharge you for not making a better showing."

Mr. Bayley laughed, showing some very good teeth.

"Want to see the house, eh? Want to inspect your future home?"

Douglass Maybury made a gesture of intense disapproval.

"Why the deuce," he demanded, "must you be disagreeable? You know there will never be anything between me and the Scarlett family."

"Do I?" Mr. Bayley smiled again. "I know nothing of the kind. I know it would be the best match in the world. You are young, good-looking, well-educated, of an old and hightly respected family. She is beautiful, good-tempered, rich as Crœsus and her father's favorite. A special com-

mission, appointed out of all the wise men in the nation, would declare that you were made for each other."

Maybury was very restive under the speech of his friend, but he seemed to try not to show undue repugnance.

"This isn't the first time you have talked that way," he replied, "and you know what I have told you ; there's no use in my repeating it."

"No, there isn't," smiled Mr. Bayley, "for it never contained anything worthy to be called an argument. I can sum it up in forty words : 'You think you are not good enough for her ; you have been playing the rake a little ; you occasionally indulge in cards, and once in a while get overtaken with wine.' Bah ! So does every other man of sense in this age ! You take your peccadilloes too seriously."

For some seconds Maybury leaned on the sill of the window, by which he had seated himself, and looked up and down the avenue. It was a pleasing prospect, the view that spread out before him. So far as New York could be said to be worth living in at all, no better locality could have been selected on which to rear a palace for a member of the American House of Lords. The future son-in-law of the Senator would be a man to be envied his habitation.

"Why don't you put the thing as it is, if you are bound to discuss this wearisome question," he asked, when he roused himself. "Why don't you admit that I could be true to no woman who was not built of the commonest kind of clay ? What a mate I would make for that delicate bit of porcelain ! Three days after marriage she would be horrified at the sight of me. In a month she would demand either a

separation or a divorce. I am a devil, Dave, and you know it, while she—"

He paused in vain for a simile.

Even the flippancy of the Architect was silenced by the manner in which this was said. Maybury had taken the matter to heart deeper than he supposed.

"To that young girl," pursued Maybury, after another moment of silence, "marriage would be a solemn sacrament. She ought to have a husband to whom she could look as to a god!"

Then the smile returned to the face of the Architect.

"She'll be likely to get one of that kind, won't she?" he queried, ironically. "You know the list there is to choose from. How many *gods* are there in the lot? How many fellows in that set are better fitted for the rôle of an amateur deity than yourself?"

Maybury was compelled to make a mental admission that this insinuation had a substantial basis.

"But there is always the ministry," he replied. "Those fellows may not have any very great standing, but they won't break a girl's heart with infidelities, nor get brought home at six A. M., too full to get into the house alone."

The Architect dismissed this notion with a wave of his hand.

"She will never marry a clergyman," he said. "She will do whatever her father wishes and he has quite different ideas. He wants some one who will build up the social end of the family. There must be Blood in the match, at all events. He likes gayety, or the semblance of it. By Gad, the old man

hasn't a very great record for living too close to the virtuous mark, if it comes to that!"

Maybury shrugged his shoulders.

"We're not talking of my marrying *him!*" he retorted. "And besides, Scarlett always knows how to carry himself. He doesn't go off at half-cock, like me. If he takes a glass he stops when he has had enough. If he sets his eye on a pretty woman he don't get into a frenzy and throw all there is of him into the scale, as I do. Why, Dave, when a woman gets hold of me, I've no more sense than that bench over there. I'd put my head in that vise and let her turn it, if she wanted. Now that's bad enough for a single man, but it would play the deuce with one married to—to a girl like that."

Mr. Bayley whistled provokingly an air from the opera of Carmen, and there came before the mind's eye of his companion the scene where the cigarette girl detains the young soldier who hears the bugle-call of his regiment.

"I only wish the chance lay in *my* way," said the Architect, presently, and with a more serious manner.

Maybury looked up at him.

"*You!*" he ejaculated. "You'd be worse than I!"

"Of course I would," said Bayley, with a trace of his old smile. "I'm more cold-blooded, to begin with. I'm not trying to raise comparisons favorable to myself, nor in fact to do anything except to indicate what, in my opinion, *you* ought to do, and could do if you liked. A marriage with the daughter of a man worth fifteen or twenty millions is not a thing to dismiss without consideration. You could

be Scarlett's son-in-law, if you chose. Now, why shouldn't you? Is it because the daughter is hideous, dull, old—any of those objectionable things that so often go with this sort of live-stock? Not a bit of it! She is pretty as a picture, intelligent, amiable, young—as Shakespeare would say, 'a morsel for a monarch.' Her family has as yet nothing but wealth to recommend them—at least on the father's side—but in the present day nobody sniffs at millionaires. She is a great catch—all New York admits that. How old is she? Nineteen; and she has refused, through the Hon. Augustus, twenty eligible offers. Why has the Senator snubbed the Van Rasselans, the Fitz Robinsons and the De Cooks? Because he has set his mind on a Maybury."

The young man half rose from his seat.

"Speak lower," he cautioned, fearing that some of the artisans in the next room might catch the drift of the conversation. "You don't know that, Dave."

"But *you* know it. You know it as well as you know you live. To-night you are invited to dinner at the Scarletts. If you should throw aside your idiotic—beg your pardon—doubts of your fitness, and say to the Senator, over your cigar, that you would like to enter his family, it would please him better than a ten per cent. advance in the price of silver bullion."

Yes, Maybury knew it. He had observed too many things to leave much doubt on this score. It was because he knew it that he hated to go to the dinner at all. He had a half fear that the Senator might propose the thing to him out of hand, instead of waiting for him to take the initiative.

"As I started to say," resumed the Architect, "what would be your sensible position? Why, to put the question to the old man—I use the ordinary technical term—and have it over with. He would tell you to ask Miss Flora, and that, if you could win her consent, you should both have his blessing. In three or four days you would run in again and he would take pains to leave you together. You would say the right thing in the right words, and she would drop those big eyes of hers and accept you with speechless content. Nothing could be more simple, Douglass. A little common sense, an ounce of courage, and it would be all over."

The Architect laid his hand affectionately on the arm of his friend and noticed that he was trembling.

"You are mistaken," came the hardly audible reply. "It would not be all over then. It would be just begun."

Mr. Bayley drew a discouraged breath.

"I could get you up a set of plans and specifications to meet every emergency," he said, "as easily as I could do them for a house or a block of stores."

Maybury straightened himself up a little and eyed the speaker with new interest.

"Do you think you could make that woman satisfied to have her husband brought home drunk?"

"My dear, helpless fellow, couldn't you keep sober a month or two, with a stake like this in view? After you were married six or eight weeks you could make a thousand excuses to get a few days away and lush to your heart's content. You're not such a common drunkard as you're trying to make out. I never saw you actually stiff but once."

Maybury shivered.

"That makes a nice picture to recall, doesn't it?" he said, bitterly. "I must have looked sweet, in the wine-room at that French ball, with Carrie Ten Brok and Mrs. Larêve, all of us so full, we couldn't tell when you put us into the carriage. You know how you and Willie Jardine had to lie your heads off to keep Larêve from divorcing Marie. And Carrie's marriage was postponed three months on account of the talk that couldn't be quieted. We might as well have done it all in the middle of Union Square. Imagine that thing occurring after I had married Flora Scarlett!"

The Architect took a few steps up and down the room.

"But it wouldn't occur," he said, on returning. "You would engage a long-headed valet, who wouldn't let you go to such lengths. I know one of those fellows, a Swiss, who would treat you like a spoiled child if you got into any such mess. You would have to take him with you everywhere, and instruct him never to let you pass a certain limit."

A laugh came to chase the dull look for a moment from the young man's face.

"You don't seem to know me as well as you think," he said. "When I am half-full nobody can reason with me. If this chap undertook to say or do too much, I'd be more than half likely to knock him down."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," was the ready reply. "He is six feet high and weighs about one-ninety. He has been taken for the Russian czar when in Europe, but he is much taller and heavier. For five years he was valet to the Duke of Y——. He would

have been there now had not the Duchess taken too violent a fancy to him. This is a secret, of course, but everybody knows it in England and on the Continent. I could get him for you, and he would stop all your monkey business just on the right side of the danger line."

But Maybury still shook his head.

"I don't think your description any too charming," he said. "A valet with whom wives fall in love is not specially attractive."

Mr. Bayley leaned very close to his companion.

"In these days," he said, with a wealth of meaning, "it is something to have a wife to whom such a thing would be morally impossible!"

There was a great deal in this, Maybury admitted to himself, a very great deal. It was the only thing that had been said which had a distinctly favorable effect upon him. He knew the rumors, the certainties that pervaded his circle in relation to married women. Everybody knew all about some of them except the husbands they were disgracing. And there were not a few cases where this giddy young man had seen fashionable weddings, with bishops and stately processions, and organ music, with a column in the society prints and a grand tour of Europe to supplement them, where the bride had only left the arms of a lover,—perhaps several of them—to go to those of her bridegroom. The husbands didn't know—they had never suspected up to this day—but some time there was liable to an explosion, possibly the snap of a revolver.

Yes, if a man must marry, it was a great thing to

have a wife of whom such things, either before or after the ceremony, were impossible to conceive.

The Architect had a good deal of shrewdness in his composition, and he saw the effect of this suggestion. But he wisely decided to say nothing more at the time, hoping that the seed he had sown would gain some root of itself, and fearful to disturb it by any more present cultivation, he suggested a walk over the premises, and, as this was one of the objects of Mr. Maybury's visit, he did not hesitate to follow his leader.

Everything was certainly in the very acme of luxury and taste.

"This entire suite is to be Miss Flora's," said Mr. Bayley, as they reached the second floor. "You see it is on the southerly side, and commands a view of the river and the park. Just look at this for a bath-room!"

In the centre of a large room, paved with the finest marbles, an enormous bath was sunk nearly to the floor level. As the Architect went on with his explanations, Maybury's mind fastened itself upon the girl who was to use that magnificent apartment; so pure and sweet that its offices must be largely superfluous; so modest, he was sure no tiring maid would be permitted to remain within those doors while her mistress disrobed herself of her final garments. To be the husband of such a creature would be a glory for one as pure, as free from the taints of earth as she, but never for a man of sensual thought, of low contemplations. From Carrie Ten Brok and Marie Larêve to Flora Scarlett was too far a cry. He could not estimate the distance.

Douglass Maybury had always considered himself

a pretty lucky fellow, but he went out of that house thoroughly despondent. If he could have been reared in a different school! Why had he been allowed to follow every inclination since he was in kilted skirts? It would have been so much better to have kept a heart in which there was one white spot, than to have waded neck-deep in all that sea of sensual passion! He thought, as he rode with Mr. Bayley toward the restaurant where they were to lunch, of a possible young man, entirely new to the knowledge of sex in its grosser and distorted shapes, wedded to a girl like Flora, living with her an idealic life in such a palace as that. The reflection was so depressing that had it not been for his promise to dine with the Senator he would have gone directly home from his lunch and drunk himself into unconsciousness forthwith.

The Architect did not again allude to the matter that preyed most deeply upon his mind. He saw that his friend was in a new mood, and he hoped that good would come of it. The match he was trying to further seemed to him a most desirable one, in itself, to say nothing of his wish to please his munificent employer. Family and wealth would make the proper combination. He thought that Douglass, as he grew older, would acquire wisdom, ultimately fitting into the convenient groove arranged for him, and grateful to those who had assisted in placing him there.

While getting ready for dinner letters were brought to Mr. Maybury, one of them being the quarterly one to which he had limited his protegé, Miss Esther Strange, now at her boarding-school. He threw it into a drawer without reading it, in a

fit of sulks that had been growing upon him ever since noon.

"I believe, upon my soul, that women will be the death of me!" he exclaimed, to the astonishment of his valet. "If I knew of a country where they never had such things, I would go there on the next train, so help me Moses!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DINNER AT FLORA'S.

Douglass Maybury went to the Scarlett mansion that evening to dinner, but he did not propose for the hand of Miss Flora. He sat at table with her and her father, raising his eyes occasionally to meet her's, as the conversation proceeded, a little afraid of her, venerating a purity so much higher than he could ever claim. And when she withdrew, according to custom, to allow "the gentlemen" to light their cigars, he discussed politics, finance, theatrical matters, and a dozen other things with the Hon. Augustus.

He was well aware that Mr. Scarlett was no saint, before Mr. David Bayley alluded to the fact. He knew him for a successful sharper, and that in the matter of women he was a connoisseur. He had no doubt the Senator would have laughed to scorn the scruples which made him feel that union with a girl like Flora was an impossibility. Appearances were the only things that Mr. Scarlett cared about. He

did not claim that a man should be as good as the woman he intended to wed, but only that his amours should make no public scandal.

The Senator did not pass the evening without allusions intended to assist Douglass in making up his mind. The unvarying success that he was having in business matters was brought up in various ways. The amount to be lavished on the new residence came in as a matter of course.

"People call me extravagant, but they don't know my resources," said Mr. Scarlett, amiably. "My fortune has come to me very fast. In fact, there is getting to be almost too much of it. After a man has a certain sum the rest is merely bother. As soon as May is twenty-one—or sooner, should she get married,—I am going to give her an even million, for pocket-money."

Mr. Maybury had to remark that this would be very convenient.

"Well, some people would so consider it," laughed the Senator. "Still, it is not likely she will ever need to touch it. My children have tastes the opposite of extravagant. Now, there's Charles. I don't suppose he spends five thousand dollars a year on himself. He gives away a lot, but his personal habits are positively penurious. He's immensely like his mother. She would have given her last penny if anybody had asked her, and she was content with the plainest living. What do you suppose Charles has done last? Why, he's been initiated into the Knights of Labor!"

This was sufficiently astonishing to draw an exclamation from the hearer, who inquired, as soon as he could command himself, how that came about.

"I don't exactly know," said the Senator, with another laugh. "I have made it a rule ever since my children were born to let them do pretty much as they please. It is the habit of most parents to surround their young people with a set of rules that make their existence a burden, but I have had none of that. My theory is that a boy or girl will show what is in them in one way or another, and that all the repression and severity in the world won't guide them in a way they don't wish to go. You look surprised, and I don't wonder, as the idea is certainly not the one commonly accepted. But the more I have watched the plan adopted by my neighbors and compared it with my own, the more I am convinced that my way is the best."

The guest had at last found something to interest him, and the attention he showed impelled his host to proceed.

"Take the case of Charles," he said. "Supposing I had spent the past twenty years in trying to instill into his mind the fact that he was the son of a man of wealth, and that certain social duties were required of him. Supposing I had given him to understand that his position raised a bar between him and the mechanic or artisan class—that he ought to maintain a dignity and reserve in his relations with them. He might have followed my instructions, but he would have lived a thoroughly unhappy and uncomfortable life. He has all the notions of a philanthropist, coupled with a feeling that men ought to be equal in the matter of brotherhood. I have let him act out what was in him; and to-day, instead of hating me, as half the sons of rich men do to their fathers, he thinks me a dear, mistaken fellow, whom he hopes

sometime to convert to his own doctrines. You cannot mould a human being as you can the material which a potter fashions with his wheel. They have bents and inclinations that all the labor in the world only serves to distort and make into something unlovely. Let a child alone, say I. Or, rather, help him along in whatever direction his tastes lead him.

"I know of a father who is trying to make a statesman out of a son who ought to be a chemist. The family influence has got the boy into the Assembly, but he dislikes politics, from a caucus to a committee chairmanship. The last time there was an important division he refused to go because an experiment in chemistry might be spoiled if he left it for an hour. The greatest trouble in this world is that men are in the wrong places everywhere. There are clergymen who ought to be cobblers, farmers who ought to be architects, doctors who would make much better engineers. I came within an inch of having my entire life ruined, because I was born in the country where there was no outlet for what talent I had. When my children came, I determined that they should do as they pleased in everything, and I would have said the same if my income had been a hundred dollars a month."

Mr. Maybury knocked reflectively from his Havana a long ash that had been accumulating—a sort of unearned increment of ash, for he had not had the cigar in his mouth for the past five minutes.

"In everything?" he repeated, slowly.

"In everything," was the earnest reply. "You see what I do with Charles. I can hardly be supposed to fancy having him with those common laborers, helping them conspire against the peace of the

business community, and yet I haven't said a word. He's got just as good a right to be there as I have to stay away, that's my whole theory in a word. The point is here, my dear Mr. Maybury ; we can't do the thinking for other people. It is morally impossible to put ourselves in their places. A thing that seems just to us, may seem unjust to them. We should leave every one entirely untrammeled and let things sift themselves out in their own way."

The young man bowed politely as the speaker reached a pausing point, and then, with some misgivings, asked whether the same sort of treatment would work equally well with girls.

"Exactly as well," was the answer, as if Mr. Scarlett had anticipated that the point would be raised. "A girl is going to do about as she has a mind, no matter how much pains is taken to swerve her. Take the simple matter of chastity, for instance. How often do we find the greatest virtue in the poorest quarters, while the Upper Ten is growing notorious for laxity. You can't doubt that goodness it inculcated into the minds of every wealthy girl, by her mother, her governess and her teachers, as she grows up. Besides this, she is surrounded with what are meant for safeguards on every side—almost fenced in from dangers to which the poorer girl is entirely undefended. Nevertheless, the kitchen-maid will fight for her purity between the slop-pail and the range, while the other deliberately plans to circumvent her pastors and guardians. What can you say to that? Present the Trees of Good and Evil to girls as well as to boys ; explain to them the nature of the fruit on both, and your duty is done. Beyond that, time is thrown away."

The young guest poured out a half glass of champagne and remarked, wondering if what he said would be thought to have a personal tinge, that *example* must have a considerable effect.

"I'm not pretending to set myself up as a professor of this science," said he, "for I know very little about it. But I should think that the young mind would be influenced a good deal by the conduct of the people whose duty it is to advise it. If a mother urges chastity upon her daughter, and the child learns that she is untrue to her teaching, the effect of her admonitions must be largely neutralized. If she inculcates charity and never gives away a cent; if she urges neatness and acts the sloven—you see my point. I have often thought that girls are better than boys, because women are better than men. The young lad learns that chastity is not reckoned a vital virtue among the masculine part of the race, and he acts accordingly."

The Senator seemed to take great pleasure in this conversation. It was not easy for him to get Maybury so deeply interested in anything, and he was glad to keep him to the mark.

"Let me ask you candidly," he said, "whether your experience has shown you that girls really *are* so much better than boys. Isn't that idea largely in the imagination?"

For a moment Maybury was unable to reply.

"Have you ever read Dr. Hammond's book?" pursued the questioner. "If you have, you may recall the instances to which I allude. It is a habit for lovers to invest their feminine divinities with superhuman attributes. I suppose that is a part of the plan of nature; but, like many other things, it sometimes

becomes abnormal. It is the custom in these days to place too great stress on mere continence. People talk too much about it, think of it too much, make too big a fuss over it. If some girl of good family 'goes astray,' as it is denominated, and the reporters get at it, all the newspapers will devote as much space to the event as they would to the derailment of a train or the failure of a bank. A thousand women who haven't been discovered read the particulars with avidity. It helps the talk at the clubs and the four o'clocks, but what other good it does I don't know. Wouldn't a man of common sense say it was a thing that concerned only the girl and her family? Her great offense is that she has violated the social code by permitting her secret to get abroad. There is a three days' sensation, and the girl is ostracised by women no better than she."

Mr. Maybury remarked that the making of newspapers was a business matter and that it was the custom of business men to offer their patrons the goods that sold best.

"That's true," was the ready reply. "But these fellows who run the papers profess respectability. As the world is made up, they know these stories will ruin the peace of some of the best people in the community. They know they would do all in their power to suppress them if they were in anything but the newspaper trade. And still they cater to scandal and serve it up with all the detail their best writers can give it."

Mr. Maybury suggested that it was the community, after all, that controlled the contents of the daily press. The editors printed what was wanted.

They were quick to scent the public taste, as shown by the receipts in the counting-room.

"You wouldn't stand in front of a barometer and criticise it for recording the humidity of the atmosphere," he said, argumentatively. "To me the daily journal is a valuable indicator of the condition of the public mind. A little while ago one of the greatest American poets died on the evening of a prize fight. The papers had immense headings over both events, on the first page, side by side, but the prize fight headings were the longer. A little before that fifty people were killed by a train falling through a bridge, on the same day that a prominent American in France discovered another man in his wife's bedroom. The editors had to cut the accident down to a column to get in ten columns that described the sensation of the hour. One of the men on the *Daily Planet* told me they could hardly print papers enough on their lightning presses, so anxious were the readers to get an exact description of the lace on Mrs. Blank's chemise. I have to plead guilty with the rest, for I bought the paper for that reason alone, when I am in the habit of reading another one whose account of the affair was much briefer."

The Senator smiled amiably at the admission, and said he had done the same thing.

"But I would like it stopped, for all that," he added. "There is no knowing when one of our friends may be the victim, and in that case I doubt if it would be so pleasant."

If the Hon. Augustus believed he was making it easier for Mr. Douglass Maybury to solicit the hand of his daughter by the conversation that has been partially given here, he was much mistaken. Posted

to some extent by Mr. Bayley, the Senator had been given a part of the reason why the young man delayed coming to the point. Miss Flora towered too far above him. He felt unworthy of such a radiantly pure being. Mr. Scarlett had tried to show his guest that too much stress might be put on sins of a venial character, hoping that this would remove the mountain in his way. In trying to accomplish this he had, however, as is apt to be the case, gone too far. His last suggestion that public exposure of one's peccadilloes would be very disagreeable, had made more impression on Mr. Maybury than all the rest.

"If I should marry Flora," he was saying to himself, "and anything about me got into the newspapers, it would simply break her heart. I am such a harum-scarum fellow, it would be as likely to happen as not. No, pleasant as it appears, it cannot be. I must give her up."

There had never been a word on the subject of love or marriage between Mr. Maybury and Miss Scarlett, but Douglass determined that she should know his mind. Everybody seemed to have picked them out for each other. It was evident that the Senator liked him immensely, while he had been as cold as the north wind to all the other marriageable young men who had sought to get within the charmed circle of his daughter's acquaintance. He was the only one of them who was ever invited to dine at the house *en famille*. Miss Flora expected him to ask for her hand, when the right time came. He had tried his best to think he ever could ask it, and he could not. This he must let her know, unequivo-

cally; or, he must let her father know, which amounted to the same thing.

He would have to marry before many years, or throw himself into the Bay. A man of his descent and appearance could have his pick when the inevitable hour came, from half a hundred heiresses of the ordinary mould, to whom a man might be untrue, if it came to that, without wanting to take corrosive sublimate. What though they had not Miss Scarlett's beauty, or a tithe of her expectations? Enough is enough, the world over.

In the morning he went to see Mr. Coke. That gentleman looked as benignant as ever, with his white hair and gold-rimmed glasses, and as on all other occasions, confined himself mainly to answering the questions put to him.

"I am going off on another journey," said Douglass. "I suppose my cash has not yet run out entirely."

"No."

"I want a letter of credit for a couple of thousand and when necessary I shall write to you for more."

"I will send it to your rooms in an hour."

Maybury had reached the door of the lawyer's office when he bethought himself of another matter.

"What do you hear of the little girl? Is she doing well at her school?"

"The accounts have been very favorable."

"You have never seen her, I suppose, since she went there?"

"Yes. She has been here two or three times, in her vacations, inquiring for you. Knowing you did not wish to be troubled I gave her evasive answers as to your addresses when you were out of town."

"How did you know I did not wish to see her?"

"She told me she had written you several times since you had sent a reply."

The old fox! Who but a lawyer would have been so wise!

"You are sending the same amount to her as before, I suppose?" said Douglass, half afraid that Mr. Coke might have stopped these payments out of some mathematical demonstration of his acute brain.

"Certainly. You have never countermanded the order."

"Did she say anything special?"

"Only that she had been to call on her relations and made her stay as brief as possible. One of her teachers has taken her to the principal watering-places when the school was not in session."

It was all right. He was very glad she had not discovered him.

When he reached his room he found an envelope in Esther's handwriting that had just been left by the postman. It contained something hard, like a piece of paste-board, undoubtedly a photograph, presumably of herself. He took it with several others he found in his bureau when clearing it out preparatory to packing up, and put it unopened in the grate.

He had decided to travel, but the point of destination was not yet thought of. The main thing was to get away from New York and the Scarletts, and let them know that he had gone, probably for a long time. He wrote a few notes, one of them, composed with great care, to the Senator. In it he said he was going for a thorough change. He

hardly knew himself where he should land. He might be gone a year or two. No one hated the formality of good-byes so much, and he was going to treat all his friends alike in that respect.

"Convey my regards to Miss Flora," he said at the end, "and tell Bayley not to expect letters. I never can bring myself to the work of correspondence when I am on the wing."

Mr. Maybury's baggage was checked for the first stage to "Washington, D. C." And Mr. David Bayley, Architect, knew it before the trunks had been gone five hours from the city.

CHAPTER X.

"IF A GIRL COULD FIND A MAN."

As Congress would not convene until later, Mr. Maybury thought himself quite safe in Washington from the Hon. Augustus for a month at least. He went to the Arlington, because it was the thing to do, though there are three or four newer hotels in which the traveler can find certainly as good accommodations for his money. Maybury had visited the Capital before and had a number of acquaintances there. He frequented one of the swell clubs in a quiet way, asking those who knew him to avoid introductions, as far as possible. In spite of this, that astute detective, Mr. David Bayley, was kept apprised of almost his every move. Mr. Scarlett, naturally, received all the information that came to

the Architect, and the only reason that neither of these gentlemen walked in upon the fugitive was because they did not deem it advisable to hasten things in the state of mind in which they believed him to be.

Miss Flora was soon told by her father that Maybury had left New York, and that he might not return for a long time. The Senator eyed his daughter furtively to discover whether this information had any pronounced effect upon her, but she was as placid as the Adriatic on a midsummer's day. She was getting ready at the time to take a ride over to the new mansion, and her only response was a simple "Indeed!" uttered without stress of tone. So very uninterested did she appear that the Senator was moved to sound her a little in reference to the matter.

"I'm sorry he's gone off just now," he said. "I shall be a trifle lonely until Congress meets, and I hoped to see a great deal of him. Douglass is good company at any time."

Flora bowed in acquiescence, as she arranged her sealskin cap before a mirror.

"Don't you think he is a very pleasant young man?" continued the father, as she seemed to have nothing further to say on the subject.

She looked up to study his face for one brief moment and then threw her gaze reminiscently into space.

"Yes," she said, at the conclusion of her rumination.

But there was nothing in it. Had he told her that one of the servants was going to leave, she would, he felt sure, have shown equal interest.

"Would you like to go with me when Congress opens?" pursued Mr. Scarlett.

At this the girl shook her head with more decision.

"You know, papa," she said, "I never liked Washington."

"Mr. Maybury is there," he replied, impressively.

"I do not see why that should make any difference."

The Senator, who had taken it for granted that his daughter entertained a feeling toward the absent one something stronger than this, was betrayed into unmasking himself.

"Do you ever think," he asked, slowly, "that some day you will have to marry?"

Miss Flora turned from the mirror, where she was arranging a stray lock of hair, and surveyed the speaker.

"Why, papa, are you tired of me?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly not," he answered. "I only speak of the natural course of events. It is not expected that a girl will allow herself to become an old maid, if she has a fair share of good looks—and especially if she has a decent fortune."

The girl turned back to the mirror, and took a complete survey of her physical charms, as far as they were revealed in its surface.

"*Have* I a fair share of good looks'?" she asked, with a trace of mischievousness.

"You are handsome, and you know it very well. You also know that more than one young gentleman of good family has applied for your hand."

Miss Flora eyed the hand for which the young gentlemen of good family had applied, as if to discover what they found so very attractive in it.

"And you have told me, papa," she said, "that most of them, in your private opinion, cared more for the money I am to inherit than for the face you are so kind as to call pretty."

"Quite true," he admitted. "It is one of the misfortunes of wealth that it provokes insincerity."

The daughter looked reflectively into the mirror and then at the richly furnished apartment.

"If a girl—could find a man—who did not care for her money,—who would love her, as the novels say, 'for herself alone,'—marriage would seem pleasanter to contemplate."

The millionaire was disconcerted by the directness of this assertion. He wondered if she had been influenced by the story-books she had read and had developed a romantic vein that had never been exposed to his view. However, it was not the first time that he had felt the force of her innocent nature, an innocence unfathomable to this man of the world.

"There is a great deal to be said on that score," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "An absolutely penniless man is seldom fitted to mate happily with a girl who has been brought up in affluence. Their habits and tastes are unlikely to agree. While wealth does not make one better in a certain sense, it refines and enlarges the social capacity, and makes its possessor fitter to manage property that may fall to his care."

The girl nodded, as if the matter was not of very great importance in her mind, and resumed her position at the mirror, buttoning her sacque.

"Mr. Maybury," resumed the Senator, when he had observed her in silence for a short time, "has been accustomed to the highest society. His family

is one of the best in the country. I think his acquaintance a valuable one to cultivate."

This was much more than he had been in the habit of saying, and his daughter could not mistake the meaning of a single syllable.

"I don't see how we *can* cultivate it at present," she smiled, "now that he has taken the pains to leave us."

"He will not be likely to remain away forever."

"No?"

Flora resumed the reflective look. Then, suddenly, she put the question to him:

"Has Mr. Maybury asked if he may marry me?"

The Senator reddened; and it was not often that he blushed.

"My dear," he answered, "I have no doubt that he realizes how very young you are and does not wish to press us. And he is such a thorough gentleman, he may also have compunctions about proposing to a girl whose fortune is so much greater than his own."

Again there was a heavy silence in the room, interrupted at last by Miss Flora's maid, who came to see if she was ready for her ride. When the servant had been dismissed with the information that there would be yet a few minutes to wait, Miss Scarlett spoke to her father.

"If Mr. Maybury ever should propose to me, you want me to accept him; is that it?"

If she had asked what they were to have for dinner, or whether her cap was on straight, she would have put the inquiry in the same tone.

"I never mean to influence my children—" began the Senator, "but—"

"It would please you, would it not?" she asked again. "It would meet your ideas of what is best to do?"

"I think," he said, anxiously, "that it would be a splendid match."

Flora looked into the glass for the tenth time. She *was* pretty, there was no denying it.

"But—he hasn't asked yet," she mused. "And—he never may. And—if he ever does, the marriage need not be for a long time."

The Senator agreed with these statements and began to recover his evenness of disposition. The unexpected way in which she had driven him to declaring his opinions had thrown him out of plumb, as one might say, for a little while.

As this seemed to bring the conversation to a period, the young lady remarked that she was ready to proceed on her way to the new house, and inquired if her father would accompany her. As he pleaded another engagement, she entered the carriage at the door with her maid and was driven to her destination.

Mr. Bayley came forward to welcome her, as was his wont. He said he was glad she had come, as he wanted her to see the suite designed for her special use before he completed the finish. She followed him to that section of the house, and listened while he explained the design, seeming to take only a languid interest.

"It will be very nice," was all she said, in answer to his voluble discourse.

"I have not decided on the frescoing in the bath-room," said the Architect, disappointed even though

he knew she had said as much as usual. "If you have any choice, it will aid me very much."

Miss Scarlett quietly entered the room in question. She stood for some moments surveying it on every side, apparently in a brown study.

"There are so many things you could have," ventured Mr. Bayley, "that it is hard to tell what to do. I have seen rooms of this kind on which large sums of money were spent, the best painters putting their finest work on the walls and ceilings. Of course, harmony is the first requisite. Now, if we were to give Tortonelli carte blanche—"

Miss Scarlett interrupted him.

"I think a perfectly plain surface will suit me best," she said. "At least, you may leave it that way for the present. After we have moved in, I can send for the frescoers, if I change my mind."

It was the custom of this shrewd diplomatist to acquiesce in the opinions of his employers whenever they differed from his own, and he made no exception of this case, though his architectural and artistic soul was grieved to the utmost. He had conceived of a beautiful allegorical sketch, in which cupids and angels were scattered over a warm ground, conveying that idea of languor which accompanies the thought of a comfortable bath. When future guests were shown over the building they would wonder, he was sure, why such a magnificent room was left in a state that must appear unfinished. The explanation that "Miss Flora desired it," would hardly satisfy the spectators.

Mr. Bayley believed that the excessive modesty of his employer's daughter prevented her from wishing too much display in a room used for such an ex-

tremely private purpose. This modesty was not of the obtrusive kind, that vents itself in downcast eyes and reddening cheeks, giving out more of self-consciousness than of a retiring nature. Flora had stated her preference for plain walls and ceilings without changing her usual manner, and her will had been law to those about her ever since she was able to walk.

From the bathroom the girl strolled to another floor, where the young carpenter, Austin Strange, was at his work. He glanced up at her entrance, but cast his eyes down again immediately. She went near him and said "Good afternoon," to which he responded in similar phrase. His work never suffered in the least because it was her fancy to spend a good deal of time watching him.

"What do you hear of your sister?" she inquired, after she had been engaged in silently observing his work for at least five minutes.

She had heard Charles speak of Esther and had inquired about her at other times.

"Nothing," was his short reply.

"Is she still at that school where she was sent?"

"I don't know."

"You answer as if you didn't care," said the girl, reflectively.

There was no reply to this statement. It took more than a remark of that kind to induce this fellow to take part in a conversation.

"You are hardly fair with her," continued Flora, when she saw that he did not intend to speak. "She has a natural liking for comfort and education and the things that make life enjoyable to a woman. If some kind person has volunteered to aid her in that

matter, you ought to be glad of it, and not act morose when you are spoken to on the subject. She may never come back, but she will do better than your father could have done for her. It is wrong to feel jealousy because she has had the good luck to reach the higher strata of life in a quicker and easier manner than some others can do."

The carpenter was planing a piece of valuable wood, requiring the greatest expertness. He went on with what he was doing, as if there was no other person in the neighborhood.

"Father wants me to go to Washington with him to spend the winter," said the girl, presently.

She knew this would make him look up, and it instantly had that effect. It did more. It loosened his tongue.

"And you told him you did not care to go."

She smiled pleasantly, asking how he could state this with such absolute certainty, but he did not reply. He was at his work again, having resumed his old attitude.

"Of course I told him that, you guesser of riddles," she said, with a tone that came near approaching familiarity. "But that does not imply that he accepted my view of the case. He says he will have to go next month, when Congress meets. Besides, Mr. Douglass Maybury is in Washington, and—he wants me to see him."

The carpenter's plane cut too deep that time. The wood he had labored on for hours was ruined, and he had to get another piece and begin again.

CHAPTER XI.

FLORIDA IN WINTER.

Maybury did not remain long in Washington, as he wanted to be sure of avoiding Senator Scarlett, who was expected early in December. He went next to Richmond and stayed a few days, examining the city, where he had never before alighted from the train. The relics of War times entertained him. He liked the situation and general lay-out of the streets, feeling that it must be a pleasant home for those who had friends and kinsmen there. A good deal of his time was consumed in going from his chamber in the Exchange and Ballard to the office and dining-room, across the bridge which spans the public street and connects those formerly divided hostelries. On departing from the Virginian capital he ran over to Old Point Comfort and Norfolk for a day or two, and then proceeded to Charleston.

Charleston interested the traveler very much, and he took in the sights thoroughly, including the historic islands in the harbor. The typically Southern architecture gratified a mind delighted with everything which bore a foreign aspect. South Carolina was as new to him as England was the first time he visited the British Isles. The immense number of negroes in the streets struck him oddly. Truly the United States was a great country, when it could present such a varying selection of people and climates, all under one flag.

At Savannah he was no less pleased. The park-

ways of the old city struck him as prettier than anything else he could recall this side the sea. The big De Soto hotel had not then been built, but he stopped at the Pulaski House, where he was treated well. He bore a letter of introduction to the editor of the most prominent newspaper, and found him a thoroughly enjoyable gentleman. The chief engineer of the county works took him to see his canals, that were transforming the "savannahs" into fertile fields, and the shell roads built through hitherto inaccessible marshes. Before he left the city Maybury was a convert to the plan of using convict labor on such works, instead of fastening the law-breakers in cells where their products compete with those of honest men outside. He visited also the beautiful cemetery in the outskirts, where the moss-laden trees shade a peculiarly beautiful spot in which to deposit the remains of loved friends.

It was January when he reached Jacksonville, going to the St. James without hesitation, so widespread is the reputation of that house as one of the best in the entire South. Here he stayed three weeks, meeting many pleasant people, among them a lady from Boston and two from Indiana, one of the latter having with her the prettiest child he had ever seen. With none of these ladies did Maybury get up a flirtation, for he was not in the flirting mood, but he walked the long piazzas in the company of the youngest, and went to several theatrical performances that came to town. Finally, the stories of the wonderful Indian River country began to impress him and he undertook the disagreeable journey.

Had Christian, in order to reach the Celestial

City, been compelled to undergo the trials of a trip to Lake Worth at the period of which I write, it is doubtful if he would ever have persisted in his endeavors. A train brought the young New Yorker to Titusville late in the evening. The few apologies for hotels were crowded with guests—there must have been as many as fifteen strangers in the town. Thinking he could get a bed on the steamer that was billed to leave at an early hour the next morning, Maybury walked along a suspicious-looking way to the wharf, where he found that the boat had not yet made her appearance from down the river. When was she likely to come? No one knew. Was there any place to sleep in, within a mile? The company's agent did not know of any.

It was now half-past eleven o'clock, and the traveler felt a chill in the air that he had not expected in that latitude. In the steamboat office several women, with their babies and husbands, were huddled around a dirty looking stove. The hardship of spending the night in a similar manner was not a serious one to a man who had slept out of doors in Africa, on the way from Tangier to Fez, in the midst of pouring rains. But there was a ridiculousness about it, in a land presumably civilized, which did not amuse him. The stove got so warm after awhile that he preferred the outer air, and he went to stroll along a plank-way that led back to what he supposed called itself a town.

The air grew chillier. A railroad employé, seeing the well-dressed man out at that hour, informed him that a private house, about a hundred rods away, sometimes "put folks up." This house, when it was found, proved to be also "full," as far as the bed-

rooms were concerned, but the proprietor (who was wandering, ghost-like, around the premises) offered the use of a sofa in the parlor, which Douglass was now too tired and cold to decline. In the morning, when the steamboat came—several hours late—it was discovered that she had eight state-rooms for about sixty passengers. These had all been engaged in advance by telegraph.

Not relishing the idea of going two nights more without a place of normal rest, the voyager left the boat at Rockledge, and was afterwards glad he did so. He found one of the prettiest spots he had ever seen and a vegetation thoroughly tropical, combined with a modern hotel whose accommodations were satisfactory in all respects. By the time the next steamer arrived he had done the "telegraph act" himself, and had the pleasure of sharing a room eight feet by five with a physician from Nebraska, who proved to be equal to several ordinary individuals in capacity for entertaining his companion.

The descent—or possibly it is the ascent—of the Indian River is a journey not to be despised. I learn that the means of travel have been improved since the date of which I am writing, and are to be still more improved in the near future. But Douglass Maybury was sure that, had the steamer been even worse than it was—a hypothesis not easily conceivable—and had he been obliged to share the "easy" chairs and sections of cabin floor on which most of the passengers had to sleep, he would have found the trip worth taking.

The currentless river, broadening often into a lagoon, the strange trees encroaching on the waters, preparing the way for land at some future date; the

palms and palmettoes; the pineapple groves and orange plantations; the tropical birds; the odd landings, sometimes half a mile from shore, made of piling, to which passengers and freight are ferried in skiffs; with the hundred and one other sights to which the American of the North is wholly unfamiliar, delighted him. He felt as if sailing on some mystic stream, at the end of which Paradise must surely be found.

And he was nearly right in this conception of the Indian River. When one reaches Jupiter and has the pleasure of seeing—nay, or passing through—Juno, Mars and Venus within ten hours, why should it astonish him when he finds just beyond them a truly Delectable Land, compared to which the Canaan of the Jews was a very poor affair?

The Cocoanut Groves of Lake Worth are in a prettier piece of tropical landscape than can be found anywhere else in all the Southern States. Truly the wind blew good to thousands which cast that shipload of cocoanuts upon this coast. Capt. Dimick and his assistants proved themselves wise men when they planted these nuts for miles along a shore till then insufficiently shaded, and no one should grudge that benefactor of his race whatever fortune has come to him from his hostelrie, suitably named the Cocoanut Grove House.

Maybury wanted to see a little of St. Augustine early in the season there, and was obliged to quit Lake Worth much sooner than he would have wished. He was something of a hunter and fisherman, and it galled him to desert such a sportsman's paradise, where panther was to be had for five miles of tramp, not to mention deer and wildfowl innumerable;

where tarpon bit, on the other side the Inlet, as he had never known them to bite in any other waters. The almanac, however, was inexorable, and he had to depart, with a mental oath to return at no distant day, prepared for a longer stay.

The river was no less impressive on the northern trip, and even the twelve hours of daylight that the boat stuck on an oyster bar was not without its enjoyment. With a night's rest at Rockledge, our traveler proceeded to Ormond, Orlando, Winter Park, Ocala, and several other places, making brief stops; and then he went to that marvel, Silver Spring.

Writers of advertisements of famous resorts are apt to exhaust the language in depicting their attractions. It would require more than an ordinary pen to do justice to Silver Spring and the Oklawaha River. Those who make the journey to Florida without boarding the little steamer that runs from the Spring to Palatka, have left the finest dish on the menu untasted. The moment the boat swings from its moorings the voyager finds himself apparently suspended in midair, with a marvelous atmosphere of light blue above and below him. So clear is the Spring that the sensation of floating in water gives way to that of hanging in the ether, as if the steamer were a balloon. Then, as the prow of the Okeehumkee points toward the river, a new astonishment begins and never ceases till the end of the journey is reached on the following morning.

Ten minutes after the boat starts, the world, as we have known it, disappears. The stream, hardly wide enough at points to allow the up boat to pass the down one, wanders with a thousand curves

through the densest of cypress groves, whose tall tops almost shut the sky from view and whose exposed roots take on innumerable fantastic shapes. This jungle, as impressive if not as dense as those of Brazil, the mocassin snake shares with the alligator. Both of them may be seen sunning themselves on the broken trunks of trees, and slipping off for more secure hiding as the paddle-wheel disturbs their seclusion. Strange birds fill the air overhead, and every fish below is outlined as clearly as through the glass walls of an aquarium. The captain, as jolly a fellow as ever managed a craft, tells you how he once shot two deer, contrary to the orders of his company, and against the statutes of Florida, which made that time of year a close season, because his sportsmanlike instinct would not let the animals cross his gunwale. He says he paid the fine without a murmur, and thought the adventure worth the money.

Lovely as is the daylight trip, the full splendors of the Oklawaha come out only at night. When the last rays of the setting sun have disappeared a fire is lighted in an iron crate on top of the pilot-house. The blaze illumines the surrounding forest, throws a red glare across the sky, and colors in exquisite hues the morasses on every side. The "plang-plung" of the wheel in the water, the cries of disturbed birds and animals, the calls of the pilot and the deck-hands break the impressive stillness of the wild woods. Turning sometimes almost at a right angle in her course, as the boat follows the tortuous current, new scenes are constantly coming into view. He must be a dull voyager who retires before midnight, and those who remain on the deck till

morning brings them out of the narrow stream upon the broad bosom of the St. John, and to the town of Palatka, are richly repaid.

It was now February and the Ponce de Leon at St. Augustine was open. When Maybury reached the town he was obliged to admit that nothing so unique had escaped the tooth of time in the New World. The old quarters are no less Spanish than parts of Cadiz or Cordova. Viewing the overhanging balconies, the strange doorways, the ancient fort, the city gate and the narrow streets, he thought he must have been transported in a dream to the land of the Cid. Besides these, the modern palaces which Mr. Flagler's millions have erected outshine anything in Barcelona, where the richest families of Iberia have of late erected a "little Paris" after Spanish models.

It was the purpose of Mr. Maybury to stay in St. Augustine until near the end of the month, at which time he intended to go to New Orleans and see Mardi Gras, but a paragraph in the Jacksonville *Times-Union* put an end to this plan. A few lines in the "Society Gossip" informed him that among the guests soon expected at the Ponce were Hon. Augustus Scarlett, Miss Flora May Scarlett, Mr. David Bayley and servants.

The Senator never cared much for Congress, and his absence from Washington when that body was in session did not surprise Mr. Maybury. Still, he wondered whether his own presence in Florida had anything to do with the proposed visit of this party. At all events he did not wish to see them, and the next morning he was ready to start toward Louisiana.

The mail clerk of the Ponce was a young man whom Douglass had known for a long time, he being connected during the summer with one of the Adirondack houses. To him he confided his new address, conjuring him by all that was holy not to divulge it to any person under any condition whatever.

On his way he visited Pensacola and Mobile, and three days later he was in the Crescent City.

CHAPTER XII.

GOING TO MARDI GRAS.

Why were the Scarletts coming to St. Augustine? They were coming because Mr. David Bayley believed it the most suitable place for them, under the circumstances.

Not being able to learn anything of the intentions of Mr. Douglass Maybury, except that he had gone to the land of flowers, Mr. Bayley thought it wise to look more particularly into the reasons that had taken him thither, and to ascertain as far as he could what his intentions were for the immediate future. The letter that the Senator had received was certainly not assuring. If Maybury left the country at this time it might never be possible to lure him back. Having started out to marry his friend to the daughter of his employer, it was not like the Architect to falter before his work was done, or until he had proved that there was no way under Heaven to accomplish it.

It seemed to Mr. Bayley that the best thing was a quiet trip to St. Augustine; an "accidental" meeting of all parties in the romantic recesses of the Ponce de Leon; a chorus of "Why, are you here! This is the last place in the world I expected to meet you!" and things of that kind.

Dr. Parton, who was called in, gave a hint to Miss Scarlett that a more congenial climate than that of New York would be greatly to her benefit in the months of February and March. Flora was not looking as well as usual, and the physician could give this advice with a clear conscience. But the girl demurred a little when the journey was proposed to her.

"I know I am not quite as well as I ought to be," she said to her father, that evening, at table. "But I have a strong suspicion that your real reason for taking me to Florida is the expectation that we shall see Mr. Maybury there."

The couple were alone in the dining-room, Charles being absent on one of his philanthropic excursions, and the servants having a general order to present themselves only at the sound of the bell.

"I will not deny," replied the Senator, "that I should like to have you meet again. Nothing is more natural than for people to be in Florida at this season."

Miss Flora toyed with the sugar tongs, in a meditative attitude.

"I think I have told you, papa," she said, "that if I ever should become engaged to Mr. Maybury, I should want the wedding postponed a long time."

"You cannot desire that any more than I, my dear," he answered. "I am sure it is also Mr. May-

bury's wish—that is—that he, while contemplating matrimony as a final goal, prefers to preserve his liberty for the present. I can leave it to you to maintain your dignity, so that whatever happens we shall not appear to be seeking him ; but if you *could* relax a trifle of your stiffness, and if he *should* gain the courage to ask for a promise—"

The girl bowed, as if she understood the rest of the sentence thus left unfinished.

"Do you think Mr. Maybury lacks courage?" she asked, thoughtfully.

"Most men suffer a little in that respect when it comes to a proposal of marriage," replied the father, uneasily.

"He has not been in the habit of devoting much time to ladies, has he?"

It was well that the girl was occupied in stirring the lumps of sugar into her black coffee ; otherwise she must have read something strange in the expression that came into Mr. Scarlett's face. He felt the need of falsehood while discussing such a man of the world as Maybury with so guileless a child as this.

"I have never heard of his paying much attention to any one in society," he said. "He has lived a purely bachelor life, going out less than most of his set."

For several minutes the girl seemed lost in dreams.

"I do not think he would make a very ardent lover," she said, finally, in a voice that showed the effect of the reverie.

Mr. Scarlett thought of Mrs. Larêve and Carrie Ten Brok, and doubted if this description of the young rake would fit their idea of him.

"He would have a proper sense of his duties, I

am sure," he replied. "Mr. Maybury is, above all, a gentleman."

The girl looked into vacancy, as if conjuring up some image.

"I should want a great deal of liberty, if I were married," she said. "I could not bear a husband like Mrs. Mothing's for instance, who acts before every one as if she might escape into the air if he took his eyes from her one moment. I cannot see why marriage should destroy the individuality, the right to be herself, that ought to be sacred to every woman. If I had a husband who tried to be my master, I could not live with him long. It must be an equal partnership, otherwise the wife is little better than a slave."

The father looked at the speaker with distended eyes. She had surprised him several times of late with her erudite utterances, but he was more than astounded to hear such elaborate views on the marriage relation from those lips. She must have been reading a lecture by Susan B. Anthony, or attending a woman's rights convention. If she had been more intimate with her brother, he might have supposed that Charles had imparted these thoughts to her.

"Mr. Maybury is not a man who would demand anything unreasonable of you," he said, after a pause.

"I shall tell him frankly what I think about it, if it ever becomes necessary," said Miss Scarlett, with positiveness. "There are promises he must make me before I will agree to take him—for life."

She hesitated before uttering the final words, as if there was something repugnant in them.

"You will not make your demand sound disagreeable, I trust," insinuated the father, gently.

"No, indeed!" replied Flora, looking up with a laugh. "I won't scare him away. But it looks very doubtful, papa, at this moment, whether I shall ever have the chance. There is no certainty that we shall see him in Florida; and if he crosses the ocean it may be years before we meet again."

The Senator had run home from Washington for the express purpose of having this talk with Flora. He was relieved to find her so tractable.

St. Augustine lost its charms for the New York contingent when they found that Mr. Maybury had already gone away. The clerk at the Ponce, torn with doubts as to which was his best course between the opposing interests, professed for a number of days to have no idea of the whereabouts of the much-wanted man. The astute Architect, however, was soon in possession of the facts. Mr. Maybury would have certainly a good deal of mail to be forwarded. Watching quietly one day till the colored boy took the letters to the post-office, Bayley made a sufficient excuse to intercept him. He pretended that he had sent a note which he wished to see again, to make sure the address was correct, and a moment later had found several with this superscription:

"Douglass Maybury, Esq., No. — Charles street, New Orleans, La."

The word "Ponce de Leon, St. Augustine," had been erased and the new address was in the writing of the mailing-clerk.

All was perfectly clear now. It was getting

toward the season of Mardi Gras, and Maybury had concluded to witness the festivities.

Putting a dollar in the hand of the black boy, Mr. Bayley returned to Mr. Scarlett.

"I have found him," he said, in reply to the anxious look on the Senator's face.

"He is here?"

"No, but he is within a short ride, and where he will probably remain several weeks."

Then he told what he had learned, throwing a veil of mystery over the manner of discovery. And Mr. Scarlett looked upon the Architect as a veritable Lecoq, a fellow to whom all secrets were open, one whom it would be quite useless to attempt to deceive, no matter how deeply the plot was laid.

When Flora was told that Mr. Maybury had gone to the Crescent City she looked thoughtful.

"It looks as if he had found out we were coming," she said, to her father. "It that were true, we could not, with a due sense of pride, enter on anything like a pursuit of him, could we?"

"You take it too seriously," replied Mr. Scarlett. "It is unlikely that any such information could have reached him. New Orleans offers great attractions during carnival week. It would not strike him as remarkable that we should go to a celebration that attracts visitors from all over the United States. I will have Bayley telegraph at once for accommodations, and as soon as he receives an answer we will start."

The girl could find no fault with this reasoning, but she did not look happy. Instead of feeling better in the Southern climate, she was not as well as when she left home. She had acquired a sort of

bluish paleness not natural to her, and her appetite had sunk to a low point. She looked at the sights of the town with little interest, and occupied most of her time in reading letters or writing them. These missives she always took to the post-office herself, accompanied by her maid or Madame Saccard.

The loungers about the hotel, and the visitors to St. Augustine in general, knew that the handsome girl was the daughter of a United States Senator, and heiress to many millions. Several ambitious young gentlemen did their best to secure introductions, but without avail. It seemed outrageous to them that so much beauty and wealth should be going "begging," as it was popularly said to be. But between this slight creature and their hopes there was a wall as strong as if made of steel, a barrier as inaccessible as though hedged with cacti. And one bright evening a carriage took her to the station, and the fortune-hunters were left to console themselves as best they could.

Mr. David Bayley was a shrewd dog. He feared if Maybury learned that this family was in New Orleans it might hasten his departure, or make it more difficult to get into communication with him. He knew it was the custom of almost everybody who is anybody to go to the St. Charles Hotel. This they do, not because the St. Charles is a remarkably good hotel, but because it is the best there is. If you should go to New Orleans and hear that one of your friends was in the city, you would naturally inspect the register of the St. Charles. When you found that his name was not recorded there, you would feel pretty certain that he had not arrived.

With this fact in view, Mr. Bayley had not tele-

graphed to the St. Charles for accommodations, but to the Royal. The Royal has the distinction of being a poorer house than the St. Charles, but in Carnival times people have been known to get rooms there. It is a thoroughly respectable hotel, big enough for a State Capitol, which indeed it was at one time, and travelers are usually told in advance that there are several very good restaurants in other streets.

The rooms which Mr. Bayley engaged by telegraph were large and comfortable. When he took possession with his fellow voyagers he did not sign their names on the register. The entry was made by Mr. Scarlett's valet, in this form: "R. A. Arnold and party;" which was unlikely to mean much to anyone who might read it in the papers the next morning.

Within an hour after the Architect arrived, he had ascertained that Mr. Maybury was still at the address on Charles street, a house where private lodgings were let to the "better" class of people. More than this, he learned that Douglass had engaged his rooms until after the close of the Carnival. The young man had brought letters of introduction to several of the most prominent citizens, including the editors of the leading newspapers. He was enjoying himself apparently and evidently oblivious of the fact that interested persons were laying a trap in which to enmesh his feet.

"I can get tickets to every event of special note," announced the Senator to his daughter on the following day, "and you shall see all there is to be seen. One of my colleagues has come home for the celebration and has extended every courtesy. I have told

him that we are incog., so he will act accordingly. When the chief events occur, we will have Mr. Maybury here tendering you his escort to them."

This was said with the hope of arousing the drooping spirits of the young lady, but she only replied by a faint smile.

If she had not hesitated to wound her father, she would have told him then that she doubted if she was destined to be a wife; that it grew upon her strongly that Fate did not intend her for a married woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOU'LL SEE NOTHING BUT 'CHAM.'"

Douglass Maybury had a very good time in New Orleans. If there is any place in America where a man can have a better time, provided he is armed with letters of introduction to the right people, I should like to know where it is. There is no other city where the masculine population to whom you are presented takes more pains to make your stay agreeable; none in which the feminine part goes farther toward making you believe they are your long-lost sisters and cousins. People who have been to New Orleans and come away without growing inordinately fond of the place are to be pitied for the opportunities they have missed.

The first gentleman to whom Maybury presented his card of introduction said in the most matter of fact way that he must, of course, send his trunk to

his (the gentleman's) house and remain there during the entire time he was in the city. This invitation, declined with difficulty, was supplemented by at least a dozen others of a similar purport from subsequent acquaintances.

And the wives of each of these gentlemen were, if possible, even more hospitable than their husbands. At the few dinners out which he accepted these ladies enlarged on the uncomfortableness of the hotels in Carnival time and proffered their best apartments to the stranger. Mr. Maybury held to his purpose of retaining his hired room, though it was something of a struggle; but he passed a good deal of his time with these new friends, whom he seemed, after a few hours, to have known for at least a year.

The Crescent City is full of club-houses. To nearly all of these a twenty days' card was sent the young Northerner as soon as it was known he had arrived. A desire to assist him to an intimate knowledge of all the drinks that are fashionable in that locality seemed universal among the club members. Men who kept carriages took him for drives. Those who had none went on long walks with him. Divining that the French Quarter would interest him specially, he was taken there about once a day, and the historic spots were pointed out.

He was escorted up the river and down the river. He went out to Lake Ponchartrain and through the old and new cemeteries, so different from anything he had ever seen in this country. He was introduced to everybody by a title which made him less ill at ease because it consorted so well with those of most of his entertainers. But sometimes, when he was

addressed suddenly as "Colonel," he gave a slight start and was for an instant disconcerted.

If the men of New Orleans were agreeable, what should he say of the women? With something in their manners that made him think of the best French society, and yet with the true American instinct dominating all, they possessed a wonderful charm. There were lovely faces about the tables at which he dined, and the conversation proved the owners as intelligent as beautiful. Had Mr. Maybury been susceptible to the tender passion—in the ordinary sense—he might have yielded his heart on that brief visit to some sweet maiden of the Creole race.

However, the young man had no idea of marriage at present, and these were not the kind to listen to empty flatteries, still less to questionable small-talk. With all his faults—altogether too numerous—he knew a real lady from the giddy creature who apes her manners while possessing none of her attributes. In the drawing-rooms which he visited he passed for the most thorough type of gentleman. People spoke of him to each other as "the kind of man one likes to meet."

Could these favored women have followed him after midnight on his other strolls, perhaps their sentiments might have been altered; but of even that what man can be sure? Who knows but the long rows of houses, the almost entire sections, on the other side of Canal street, where their more unhappy sisters begin the night about the time these others end it, are taken into account by those bright beings, and the rendezvous of their male friends discounted in advance, if not forgiven?

If there is any place on earth (and of course there

is not) where the sons of Adam might plead an excuse for setting aside that Commandment which Protestants number seven, it is within a stone's throw of the great shopping centre in that same City of the Crescent. Here are collected "soiled doves" with plumage so nearly white that only the surroundings make it possible to believe the truth. Whence come they—these faces that might serve as models of Innocence, these forms of which no chisel even wrought the equal from the marble of Carrara? Surely it has required a seminary education to furnish minds that can follow one into any field of conversation; surely it has taken masters in music to train those hands and voices to give forth such melody!

They are not from the lower ranks, these sirens. Even when the champagne fills their heads no uncouth or indelicate word escapes their bewitching mouths. They are dressed with taste and propriety, few coteries could produce their equals in beauty and grace. And yet—they are here!

Douglass Maybury let no sight of this kind escape him in the travels he made. He told a friend, afterwards, that nowhere on either side of the ocean had he found so much to wonder at as in those houses, divided from the rest of that city by a line as distinct (though invisible) as if it were a veritable Chinese Wall.

He was not a man who moralized a great deal. He did not care to trace the lives of these girls back to their once pure childhood and ascertain how they made this descent. He could have guessed, perhaps, that the first steps were as slow as the later ones were rapid. The way through which such

women passed was tolerably familiar to him. He had read the lines of Byron, and no man knew better of what he wrote :

> " In her first passion woman loves her lover,
> But after that all that she loves is love."

But, to return to the outer air. Maybury went with happy parties to the great balls given by the city's elite and he watched also from convenient balconies the glittering processions in which the participants outdo their rivals of the Mediterranean coast. It is always an exhilarating sight to witness thousands of people in commotion. The gayly-caparisoned steeds, the gaudily-decked barges, the brightly-garbed actors of the mythical parts, the showers of confetti, the banners, the music, all combined to make an exhibition not easily forgotten.

So far Maybury had heard nothing of his pursuers. But at the grand ball that closed these festivities for the more reputable of the Crescent Cityites, our traveller was startled by seeing, across the French Opera House, the familiar face of Flora Scarlett !

For a few moments he sat quite still, watching furtively to discover whether she appeared to notice him. There was nothing to indicate that she did, and the suspicion that he was being followed left him with a kind of shame that he should have harbored such a thought. Miss Scarlett was not accompanied by her father, nor by any person whom Maybury recognized ; she was surrounded by a group of people whom he had never seen as far as he could remember. They were pointing out the masquers to her, guessing, as were the others, at their

identity, and she was smiling back with an air that was polite if not thoroughly engrossed in what they were saying. She was paler than usual and to the eyes of the on-looker was not as well as she had been.

Curiosity as to how she happened to be in New Orleans, and as to whether her father had come with her, began to prey on the watcher. The girl certainly presented a very attractive picture, in the full evening dress which she wore. Her gown was entirely of white, and her fair, round shoulders had nothing whatever to protect them but a boa of white fur, pushed back on account of the heat of the theatre. There was not even a diamond or a pearl visible, and the beauty of the heiress shone effulgent without anything to add to its natural charms.

"Do you see that handsome girl over there, Mr. Maybury?" asked a voice at his elbow. "My friend says she is the daughter of a Western Senator, who is worth millions."

It was a Northern girl who made the remark, Miss Mansfield of Indianapolis, who was visiting relations in the city.

"I am acquainted with her," said Maybury, quietly. "I was just thinking whether I ought to go and present myself."

"*Are* you!"

Miss Mansfield made this exclamation with the unconcealed envy that so many people show for those on terms of intimacy with the Great of this world. She wondered how well Mr. Maybury knew Miss Scarlett, and if he would offer to present her to that young lady.

"Yes," said Douglass, presently, as if thinking aloud, "I ought to go over and speak to her."

The spectators between the young man and the aisle moved to give him room, while the whisper passed around that he knew the daughter of a silver and railroad King—that handsome girl on the other side of the circle. Quite oblivious of the commotion his actions were exciting, Maybury made his way slowly through the crowd, for even standing room was filled, to where Miss Scarlett sat. The chair she occupied was an end one, so that it was not hard to reach her, and in a few moments he had leaned over her shoulder and spoken her name.

"Why, Mr. Maybury!"

The fact that she was the Senator's daughter was now known to most of the people in the house and nearly every eye was turned as she rose to greet the new-comer. Although she had recognized Maybury long before he did her, and had realized that he was coming in her direction, she simulated surprise very well, without overdoing the matter.

The gentleman who sat next to Miss Scarlett rose and proffered Mr. Maybury his seat.

"Take it for the present," he urged, when the invitation was declined with politeness. "I wish to go to another part of the house for a short time."

Miss Scarlett joined her voice in this request, and as she made room by changing to the other seat, Douglass could do no less than take the chair thus vacated.

In a moment the young couple were chatting like old friends. The girl did everything to put him at his ease, and there was nothing to indicate to the

onlookers that she had ever given him an instant of uneasiness.

"How long have you been in New Orleans?" she asked.

"Nearly a fortnight. I have long wanted to see the Carnival, in order to compare it with the similar sports of Italy and other parts of Europe. When did you arrive? The Senator is with you, I presume?"

Yes, she told him, her father was with her. Then she incidentally mentioned that she was not quite well, and that the doctor had recommended the trip.

"I hope it is nothing serious," he said.

"No, I think not," she replied, with a little laugh. "I don't seem to have any strength, and I cannot bear the least cold. However, I think home is the best place for me, and I am trying to persuade them to take me back."

He felt easier when he heard this, and his face grew redder.

"Probably your illness is only temporary; at least we must hope so," said he. "A great point in all such cases, I believe, is faith and courage."

She laughed that strange little laugh again.

"Let's not talk about it," she said. "Tell me of your travels instead. You have been gone from home a long time, and must have seen much."

Both had forgotten the spectacle on the stage, and the hundreds of people who were looking in their direction began to speculate whether there could be anything "understood" between them.

Maybury told her of some of the things he had seen, dwelling especially on the loveliness of Lake

Worth and the Indian River country. When he alluded to St. Augustine his companion stopped him by an interruption.

"Why, we have just come from there! The town is pretty, but I found it rather dull. Things are not very gay when one is trying to play the invalid."

"Of course you have an escort here," Douglass said, a little later, when there occurred a pause in the conversation.

"Not exactly," replied the girl, with a slight flush. "I wanted to be free, so I only brought papa's valet and my maid. I think, if you will be kind enough to assist me to the door, I will let Arnold get the carriage. It is early, to be sure, but I shall be better off at the hotel, I am afraid."

A glance at the young lady's face showed that she had grown paler even since he had been sitting with her. He made no excuse for delay, but took her on his arm and escorted her to the neighborhood of a dressing-room, into which she went to find Margot. During the little promenade the slight figure of the Senator's daughter was very near to that of Mr. Maybury. Her bare arm pressed heavily upon his. Her head drooped toward his shoulder. She evidently needed the assistance he was giving her.

What little things affect our entire future lives! Maybury could never feel in reference to Flora Scarlett as he had felt before, after that brief walk from her seat to the door of that dressing-room.

The young man waited patiently for at least ten minutes till the girl re-appeared, in company with her maid; then, for a minute longer, while Margot found Arnold, and another minute while Arnold took his check and got his hat and coat. When these

things were accomplished he escorted Miss Scarlett to the door of her carriage and saw her enter it.

"Tell your father," he said, "that I should like to see him to-morrow. I am at No. — Charles street, in private lodgings."

She roused herself from the half-recumbent position she had assumed.

"I am very thoughtless," she replied. "We are at the Royal. You must certainly come to see us—to see papa—there. And a friend of yours is there also, Mr. Bayley. They will never forgive you if you do not call."

When she was driven away Maybury found that he was in a perspiration. He walked slowly toward Canal street, ignoring the proffers of several cabmen to take him there.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed aloud, when he had gone three hundred yards. "Pshaw! What feeling is this that has come over me?"

Going into one of the clubs, he sat down to wait the coming of Major Dilbach, who had agreed to go with him later in the night to an annual dance given by some "Well-Known Gentlemen," whose identity no one was supposed to suspect. This ball was understood to be in the most striking contrast to the one he had just left. No woman laying any claim to virtue, Major Dilbach had said, would be allowed in the hall. It was to be an imitation, so far as the climate and racial peculiarities permitted, of the affairs in the Casino de Paris and the Moulin Rouge.

The Major was not due for some time, as the ball to be attended would not reach its most enticing stage until after one o'clock A. M. Maybury threw

himself into the depths of an easy-chair and relapsed into a reverie that was undisturbed till the advent of his friend.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting," said the jolly Major. "The ball's only ten minutes walk from here. Let's have a drink before we go, just for a bracer. You'll see nothing but '*cham*' when you get among the girls."

CHAPTER XIV.

GLIMPSE OF HAMBURG.

The man who drinks has one questionable advantage over his teetotal neighbor; he can throw off temporarily those sad and thoughtful moods that come to most men. For an hour before Major Dilbach arrived, Douglass Maybury had been in a decided fit of the "dumps." His brief conversation with Flora Scarlett, followed by that walk to the carriage with her leaning on his arm, had unsettled the very comfortable frame of mind in which he had been ever since his advent to the Crescent City. He did not know exactly what ailed him, but he was far from happy; and to be in any other state but that of positive joy on the night of Mardi Gras, and in New Orleans, is of all things in the world the most undesirable.

He had not been five minutes in the ball-room of the "Well-Known Gentlemen," however, before he had relieved the pressure on his mind and regained

his accustomed spirits. Dilbach introduced him to several of the gayest people there, and a prompt adjournment to the wine-room was immediately in order.

If the floor of the hall was a scene of gayety, what words shall describe the ante-room where the wine was served? The fairest flowers from the region beyond Canal street were there in full force. From those handsome faces masks were in most cases absent. The full dress, which society permits and encourages even at more select assemblies, revealed dazzlingly-white busts and shoulders that might have tempted good St. Anthony, to say nothing of the ordinary modern sinner. Eyes radiant before grew brighter from the effects of costly liquids which flowed as freely as lager at a German banquet. Dozens of men in dress suits sat at tables with these fairies, buying whatever they chose to drink, repaid by their companionship and conversation and the prospect of a whirl in the waltz or polka. Above the noise of the loud talking in which everybody indulged could be heard the constant popping of corks.

"It's only once a year, you know," said his new friend to Maybury. "The thing to do is to make the most of it."

Yes, it was evident that was the thing to do. A moment later, Madge Farwell, the handsomest girl in the party, recognized Maybury and called him to her side. The fact that another gentleman had just opened his third bottle of wine for her, had no effect on the beauty. She deliberately turned her back on him while she gave her sweetest smile to the Northerner, inquiring why he had not been to see her for

a week in spite of his positive promise the last time he called.

Such was the good nature that prevailed in this assemblage that the discarded suitor rose and with a pleasant "Good-evening" took his leave of the couple, going to another part of the room and ordering another bottle for the first girl who would allow him that privilege; while Maybury, notwithstanding the fact that he had just drank and that Madge had a full glass in front of her, made frantic appeals to a waiter who was passing to bring him another bottle with the very least delay.

In the midst of the young man's explanations of the cause of his neglect, the music for a waltz was heard, and a moment later he was on the floor of the ball-room, whirling his fair companion to the nimble strains. As she held up her long trail with one hand and rested the other on her partner's shoulder, Miss Farwell presented a picture entrancing to any eye that could forget, for the nonce, the moral side of it. Her large orbs were dilated with the champagne she had taken, and her cheeks were flushed. Maybury was obliged to clasp her very close in order to keep her to the exact time, and her breath, touching him on the neck like a zephyr from the Spice Islands, came and went with rather more than the usual rapidity.

It would not be fair to say that Madge was intoxicated. She spoke with perfect intelligibility. She knew what was said to her. Her manners never left her for a second. And when the dance was ended she walked with no staggering step—indeed, with extraordinary straightness—back to the wine-room with her escort, and began without delay to consume

the vintage of France as if she had not tasted a drop during the evening.

Some of the wealthier of the young men present came over to speak to Miss Farwell from time to time, and soon she had agreed to give the next figure—a quadrille—to Col. Kimston, a cotton planter from up the river. Almost as curtly as she had cut his predecessor Madge turned from Maybury to the new favorite, and our traveller found himself locked arm-in-arm with Major Dilbach, promenading the ball-room.

There were now a great number of dancers present, perhaps two hundred of them being women. Of these fully half had visors over their eyes, or wore complete masks, making it impossible to distinguish even familiar countenances. As he was passing up the hall, Douglass heard his name spoken in a low key.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "here is some one who seems to know me!"

The girl who had accosted him was in the ordinary street dress, with nothing to distinguish her from the others, and her mask completely puzzled the young New-Yorker. The Major promptly took himself out of the way.

"I can't recognize you, I am forced to admit," confessed Douglass, after a few words of conversation.

The girl laughed, guardedly, as if she did not wish her voice to betray her, and then, at his request, she took his arm and they began a promenade.

"You don't deny that you are Douglass Maybury?" said the incognita.

"Certainly not. As I have no mask it would be useless. Tell me, before I die of curiosity, where we have met before."

She answered that he ought to guess.

"That's not easy," he retorted. "I have been to so many places since I came to New Orleans, and met so many people. Was it—on C—— Street?"

She shook her head decidedly.

"I am afraid that guess is not complimentary," she replied.

He felt a little shiver running down his spine. Suppose she was not one of the class he had assumed, he had put his foot in it nicely, had he not? But, on the other hand, there was not much danger. It was incredible that a real lady should be at a ball of that description unattended.

"So you do not admire C—— street," he said. "And yet I hear that some of the most charming girls in the city are to be found in that locality."

"You have not seen me there, at least," she answered haughtily.

Puzzle his brain as he might he could not connect her appearance with anything in his memory. When the music began again he danced with her, and noted that she lacked something of the grace of his late partner, the fair Miss Farwell. She moved like one not used to the steps, or at least not long familiar with them. When the next quadrille attracted all the spectators to the exhibition of lingerie, this girl gave him a new view of her character.

"I do not care to see that," she said, as he began to push toward the centre.

Upon the visible mouth there was a perceptible sneer, and he fancied that the invisible eyes flashed

with scorn. He was disappointed, for like a true lover of Paris he was inordinately fond of the can-can, and disliked to miss a single kick even of the feeble imitation that was presented here. His companion and himself were almost the only persons that had not pressed toward the place where several of the more daring dancers were already elevating skirts and displaying hosiery. The loud shouts of approval from men and women alike, made him utter an audible sigh before he was aware that it was upon his lips.

"Don't let me keep *you* from going," said the incognita, in a voice that seemed frank enough. "I will wait here for you."

The delighted screams of the crowd were too much for the gallantry of Maybury, and saying that he would be gone but a minute, he hastened to the scene. The performance that met his eyes need not be described to any one who has attended an Arion or Cercle de l'Harmonie ball in New York. It was the kind of dance which—when executed with full spirit—has upon the baser passions of men the same effect that alcohol has upon the brain—setting the pulses on fire and driving the beholder almost to madness. The onlookers, both male and female, shouted their approval, urging the dancers to increased license, but they had already gone as far as even the liberty accorded once a year at this place would permit. The music of the quadrille ended in a burst of applause, as the last vision of Hamburg edging and point lace disappeared from view.

"How does that please you, Mr. Maybury?" asked a woman's voice at his elbow, and Douglass, intoxicated by something stronger than wine, turned to

behold another masker, whose identity was as well concealed as the first one. Looking toward the point where he had left Mask No. 1, he saw that she was still there. For an instant he had thought it a trick in costume, and that he was being deceived by the same person in another dress.

"I am very well, thank you," was his response. "Now, will you tell me your name, or where I have met you, as I must confess my entire ignorance of both."

The half-hidden eyes seemed to pierce him.

"It does not matter," said their owner, in a voice that was evidently disguised. "The fact that I know you is proved by my knowledge of your name. Mine is of little consequence. Will you answer the question which I first addressed to you. How did you like that dance?"

He was ill at ease in the presence of this double mystery. Both of these girls might be merely the ordinary people met at such places, in spite of the professed modesty of the first one. On the other hand, they might be of an entirely different grade of society, and have come here, secure in their hidden identities, to spy upon the doings of the nether world.

"The dance speaks for itself," he replied, evasively. "But pardon me for saying that I am obliged to return to a lady whom I promised to desert for only a moment. I trust you will remain in the hall till I can have another opportunity to solve the mystery that surrounds you. Are you here alone?"

"No, indeed!" was the slightly indignant reply. "But there is no need of your leaving me so abruptly.

I shall be very glad to be presented to your lady friend."

Maybury stood for some seconds in doubt.

"I do not know her any better than I do you," he replied, at last. "If she is not afraid of your discovering her secret, I shall be only too glad to introduce you. If you will excuse me a moment I will ascertain."

Bowing politely, the young man went toward the first masker.

"I want the privilege of introducing you to another acquaintance of mine," he said, with a laugh.

"That lady you were speaking with?"

"The same."

"Who is she?"

The young man laughed again.

"She has puzzled me as much as you have," said he. "She came and called me by name, and for the life of me I can't find a single thing to recognize in her figure or tones. When I told her I had another engagement, she said she would like to meet you."

Mask No. 1 reflected a little, and finally said she saw no objection, if what Mr. Maybury had said was strictly true.

He assured her that all was as represented. And a minute later he presented the women to each other under the titles which I have given them.

"Mask No. 2, permit me to present you to Mask No. 1."

The natural thing was a procession to the wine-room, where Mask No. 2 proved herself an adept at champagne drinking. Mask No. 1, on the contrary, did no more than sip the contents of her glass. Mask No. 2 did most of the talking on the feminine side,

the other one hardly more than responding with a yes or no.

"That's a pretty girl!" was the exclamation of Mask No. 2, as Madge Farwell swept by, on her way back to the dancing-floor. "I heard a gentleman say, a few minutes ago, that she was one of the best known women of the half-world. Do you know her, Mr. Maybury?"

The query was too pointed to evade, and Mr. Maybury responded that he knew Miss Farwell slightly, and had danced with her in the earlier part of the night.

"How well do you know her?" asked Mask No. 2.

Douglass reddened like a rose. The insinuation, coming in such a way, and from such a source, disconcerted him.

"I have only called at her residence with other men and drank wine in the parlor," he said, in confusion.

"I suppose you have often been to places like that?" said Mask No. 2, without pausing.

"It is the right of an accused person to refuse to criminate himself."

Mask No. 2 shook her head impatiently.

"Don't be foolish," she said. "I am not a detective. You need not answer if you don't wish. Of course, you have been to plenty of them. Do you think the women who inhabit them lead happy lives?"

Though surprised beyond measure Mr. Maybury found voice to reply that he did not believe, on the whole, the lives of such women were happy.

"*I* do," said Mask No. 2. "They are loved!"

A coterie of women swept by at the moment,

laughing merrily. Each had an escort, some of them two.

"What do you think about it?" asked Maybury, turning to the nearly silent figure at his right.

"I think," she said, "they must be miserable when the dance is over and the lover gone."

The voice had a tremble in it quite distinct to the listening ear of the young man.

"You forget," replied the second mask. "There will be another dance and another lover."

The second masker was looking wistfully after the dancers whose lot she rated so highly. Presently the quadrille music was heard again, that tantalizing strain which sent the crowd to the centre of the hall every time it was played.

"Come, we must not miss that!" cried Mask No. 2, rising.

But the other mask held back again. In this dilemma Maybury hardly knew what to do. If either of the maskers interested him most it was the one who would not see the can-can; and yet he wanted very much to see it himself.

"You can find me again!" exclaimed Mask No. 2, breaking from them.

She pushed to the front of the peering crowd, as if she could not bear to miss the choreographic display in progress. Two maskers, who had come to the hall with her, pressed close to her side. Maybury, excusing himself again from his partner, sought as close a place to them as the density of the crowd permitted.

"This is n't half a can-can!" cried one of the spectators, contemptuously. "In Paris they wouldn't think anything of such a poor exhibition!"

The girl who has been called Mask No. 2 turned and whispered something to the woman at her side.

"No, no! You should not think of it!" was the woman's reply.

The girl put her hand heavily on the shoulder of her other companion.

"It'll be all right, won't it?" she said, in tones that were almost pleading.

"Why not?" he answered. "You've got a mask on. No one knows you."

Those who stood nearest gathered from these remarks which, though uttered in low voices, were heard by many, that the masker contemplated giving a dance on her own account. Shouts rent the air that now there would be something worth seeing, and handkerchiefs were waved to the orchestra in the gallery to send out its very liveliest music.

Into the center of the ring formed for her, sprang Mask No. 2 and began her *pas seul*. The most depraved of the spectators had no reason to find fault. The man who had been in Paris declared afterwards that it left nothing to be desired. Used as Douglass Maybury was to scenes of this sort, his face was the color of a peony when the music's end closed the exhibit.

"Did that suit you?" asked the masker, breathlessly, coming up to him and speaking with her lips almost touching his own.

"It was perfect!" he replied, gazing with swimming eyes into the apertures in the mask where her eyes were nearly hidden.

"Some day," she said, as if with a depth of meaning, "I may dance that for you again!"

CHAPTER XV.

"NOT ON THE MORNING AFTER."

Mr. Maybury would have detained the speaker for further explanations, but she had taken the arm of her escort and was moving toward the exit that led to the street. For a moment he stood where she left him, confused with the events of the last ten minutes. He had drunk a good deal of champagne, and his head might have been clearer. He was not intoxicated, in the ordinary sense of the word; but his senses were slightly dulled. He felt sure as he saw the retreating form of Mask No. 2 that he had heard her voice before, somewhere outside of that hall, in a time past which he could not distinctly recall. The girl had neglected in those closing words to assume the artificial tones she used during the first part of the night. Her more natural key had awakened memories of something he could not locate.

It is seldom easy to discover an identity hidden behind a ball-room mask. The tones of an intimate friend lose their familiarity when the well-known face is concealed. Maybury had heard this voice before, and that was all he could say positively. As he watched the doorway from which she had vanished, it seemed to him that were it not for the alcohol in his brain he would be able to remember.

Recovering himself, the young man was about to go to the part of the hall where Mask No. 1 awaited him, according to agreement, when Maj. Dilbach

came up and slapped him boisterously on the shoulder.

"Gad! what a dance your friend gave us!" he exclaimed. "I never saw anything to equal it, not even that winter I spent in France, five years ago. And here's something I picked up when she had left the floor, that I think she would like to recover."

He held up to the gaze of his astonished companion a combination of silk elastic, of a blue shade, gold clasps and a handsome jewelled setting.

"Give it to me," said Maybury, with vivid interest "It would be a shame to keep a thing like that, which might get a lady into trouble."

He reached out his hand for it, but the Major hesitated.

"You know her, then?" he asked, as if in doubt.

"Certainly," replied his friend, with unblushing mendacity. "I am to meet her to-morrow. That's a good fellow," he added, as Dilbach handed him the article. "She will owe you her warmest thanks."

The Major had no sooner given up his trophy than he experienced an inward regret at having done so.

"I say," he suggested, "she must be a terror. Is she a society girl, with a dance like that?"

"Recollect," replied Maybury, with an attempt to be very serious, "that she had her mask on. That lady is as virtuous as Florence Nightingale, in spite of her insane freak. She doesn't think I penetrated her disguise, and I don't know as I shall tell her. However, she shall have this thing back, and that will ease her fears."

Dilbach took these statements for Gospel truth, and having the article in his possession Douglass

did not see why he should waste more words on him. Beside, he must find Mask No. 1. He could not remember exactly where he had left her, as the four sides of the room were so alike, and he nearly made the complete circuit before he found her.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked, looking down at the girl, who seemed more impassive than ever.

"I have been ready for some time," she replied. "If you will get your things, we will leave at once."

Confused by the recent occurrences Maybury might have forgotten his hat, which he had left in the checking-room, unless thus reminded. In his absence his companion donned a thick veil which as completely hid her features as the mask she removed. When he returned she took his arm and accompanied him to the street door. Here it was found impossible to get a carriage for love or money, unless previously engaged. After her escort had exhausted his temper in fruitless efforts to find one that would take them, the girl remarked quietly that she would prefer to walk rather than endure further delay.

"It is a beautiful morning," she said, looking at the bright sky.

And, indeed, it was. Where else in all America, are there more beautiful mornings in the early days of March? The breeze blew salubriously from Ponchartrain. The sun's rays were tempered by the fleecy clouds which hung like celestial parasols across the horizon. The very roadways exhaled odors that inspired and uplifted the pedestrians. It is a peculiarity of the climate of New Orleans that even the not over-clean streets lose their miasmic effect by that wonderful chemistry of nature which turns the phosphate of the gardener into pinks and roses.

What would breed a pestilence in New York or Boston loses its harmfulness in this municipality, lying below the level of the giant river which sweeps by its portals. Statistics show that there are few cities in the world where the death rate is so low as in New Orleans.

"It is a pity to walk," said Maybury, convinced nevertheless that this was the best way out of the dilemma, provided she had not too far to go. "At what hotel are you staying?"

When the girl answered "The Royal," he started as violently as if she had stabbed him with a knife.

"The Royal!" he echoed, stopping short on the sidewalk.

"Yes. It is not more than ten minutes' walk from here."

Maybury drew her arm again within his own and set out at a rapid pace in the direction of the hotel named. The liquor that had affected his brain was cleared away by those two words of hers, and he felt a shame and distress such as he had never known before.

"The Royal!"

There is something about excessive drinking that inclines one to be maudlin in his regrets and repentences. To Douglass Maybury those words brought a vision of the fair daughter of Senator Scarlett, as her rounded arm rested on his sleeve in the French Opera House, only a few short hours before. The contrast between the innocence of that creature and the scenes to which he had gone immediately on leaving her, was as the distances between the poles. Flora Scarlett liked him; he knew that by intuition, as well as by the confidences of David Bayley. A

marriage between them had been considered as among the possibilities. Just before going to the ball given by the "Well-Known Gentlemen," he had given himself up to a reverie, in which the figure of Miss Scarlett had taken the most prominent part. He must marry some day. It had seemed to him, after leaving that pure girl at the Opera House door, that perhaps he might bring himself to a partial worthiness to share her life. And now the name of the hostelrie where she slept the sleep of innocence had been spoken by the companion of his debauch, a woman who had passed the later hours of the night, like himself, amid scenes of revelry and dissipation!

They walked on in silence until they had passed into what may be called the Creole Quarter. Few people were yet to be seen in the streets except late patrons of balls, early patrons of the markets, or the market people themselves. A clock sounded the hour.

"I did not know it was so late," said the girl, when she had counted the strokes. "I hope the hotel servants will not think it remarkable to see me coming in."

"Not on the morning after Mardi Gras," he said, reassuringly. "All rules are suspended on such occasions. Night has been turned into day. Many men—and women—have been betrayed into excesses of which they will feel a little ashamed later. But it is only once a year, and that will quiet their accusing consciences. It is necessary, I believe, for humanity to have its fling once in a while, to relieve a pressure that might otherwise burst the machinery."

There was a moment of silence and then the veiled girl asked:

"Are you sure it is only an annual affair with most of the people we have just left?"

"I think it was at least an exaggerated form of dissipation for most of them; that is, of the masculine part."

"And—the women?"

The question came straight and clear. Maybury wished again for a full view of the face of his companion, that he might have some guide what answer to make.

"Most of the women," he said, finally, thinking it best to be truthful in the absence of the desired information, "are not such as an affair of this kind could harm."

The next question was as direct as the one that preceded it.

"You would judge, would you not, by the mere presence of a woman in that hall, that her character was not what it should be?"

He writhed uneasily before the rigid examination.

"It would raise that suspicion," he said, "unless she showed more modesty than the average of them; as, for instance, you did."

"Then," she said, as if pleased to hear it, "you do not think me as wicked as the others?"

"I shall think you whatever you desire me to think," he replied, gallantly. "I have not the least disposition, as they say in politics, to go behind the returns."

They were nearing the hotel and both instinctively walked slower, not wishing to stand too long in sight of its doors.

"Before you go, tell me we shall meet again," said Maybury, gallantly. "It would be a pity to think this the end of an acquaintance that has given me so much pleasure."

"Spare your compliments," she answered. "How can I ever see you? The circumstances under which we have met form a bar to future meetings."

"And am I never to look upon that face you have so carefully concealed?" he asked, sadly. "You have the advantage of me in that my features, even my name, are known to you."

The girl hesitated before replying. In the choicest and most delicate phrases he could command, the young man urged his case, until she half relented.

"I cannot promise anything," she said, "and I really must not stand here a moment longer. Give me your address and, if it is possible, I will send you some message. I would like to meet you, I am willing to own it, but I fear you would connect me unpleasantly with the scenes of this night, and that I should never stand as high in your esteem."

To this the young New-Yorker found a suitable disclaimer, and taking his card from its case he wrote upon it the number and street where he was at present residing.

"How long are you to remain in New Orleans?" she inquired, taking the card.

"I was going in a day or two," he said, "but I shall wait a word from you now. Yes, I am serious. My time is entirely at my disposal, and I want to see you very much indeed."

"Well, good-bye, now."

Pressing the hand he held out to her, the incognita

went toward the ladies' entrance to the Hotel Royal, while her companion slowly walked toward Charles street.

CHAPTER XVI.

DRUNK AS A FOOL.

Mardi Gras had come and gone, the Scarletts had been in the city over a week, and upon the surface they had accomplished very little toward the conquest of the son of Judge Maybury. If the Senator had not had a confidence in Mr. David Bayley that amounted to blind faith, he might have complained of the slowness with which things were moving. He knew that his daughter had met Douglass at the French Opera House the night before, and that the young man had promised to call upon him before leaving New Orleans. He knew, for he had seen Flora on her return from the spectacle, that her conversation with Maybury had been agreeable, and that she had no doubt he would keep his word. With these assurances he was compelled to be content, and await the slow issue of events.

Miss Scarlett rose late on the morning after Mardi Gras. She told her father when she met him at lunch that she had not slept well, and a glance at her tired eyes convinced him that she spoke the truth. It was not the first night she had slept badly. The mysterious illness still kept its sway over her. Dr. Parton had prescribed for it before she left New York, and had predicted that it would soon give way to his treatment and the restoring influences of

the Southern climate. When this prediction was disproved, the Senator sent for the doctor, saying nothing to Flora of his action, and telling the physician to pretend that he had come to the Crescent City, like the rest, on a journey of pleasure only.

Dr. Parton had arrived, seen his fair patient, had a long talk with her, and made a slight change in the prescription she was to take. He said to the Hon. Augustus that it would take a little time before the effect of the new medicine would be perceptible, but that he saw no ultimate danger in the symptoms.

When Miss Scarlett made her appearance on Wednesday, therefore, her father studied her face closer than was his wont. She only addressed him a pleasant 'Good-morning," and betook herself to the lunch.

"How do you find yourself to-day, May?" was the question which greeted her.

"I didn't know I had been lost," was the half humorous reply. "Really, papa, I wish you wouldn't ask that question with such a serious air. I'm not quite well, as you know, but neither am I very ill. It will pass off in time, if we only have patience. Dr. Parton has sent to New York for something which he thinks will improve my spirits. Until it comes, you must expect to see me a little downcast, but the less you allude to it the better it will be for me."

Mr. Scarlett drew a long breath, but replied immediately that he would say nothing more on the subject, and then turned the conversation abruptly.

"Did Mr. Maybury name any special hour at which he would call?"

"No. He said 'to-morrow.'"

The father gazed at her thoughtfully.

"He appeared glad to see you?"

"Yes. He was very kind indeed."

"But still," Mr. Scarlett waited a second to find the exact language he wanted, "he said—nothing—particular."

Miss Flora looked up from the food she was pretending to eat, and assumed a quizzical expression.

"My dear papa," she answered, "was it a time and place for anything definite? People could hear every word he spoke."

The Senator wished that his Architect were present, to advise him in this important emergency.

"He *ought* to say something particular—something definite," said he, "before we leave New Orleans."

The girl bowed absently.

"My child," said the Senator, bending toward her, "you are still willing to marry him, are you not?"

The girl slowly put down the glass of claret from which she was drinking.

"Mr. Maybury is the only marriageable man who is not distasteful to me," she replied. "As I have told you already, I hope to have my wedding postponed to as late a date as possible; but I am willing to have it understood and—arranged."

She rose from the table without looking at him, put in place some hair that hung over her forehead, and then left the room, passing a caressing hand over her father's shoulder as she went by him.

Let us now look in upon Mr. Douglass Maybury in his lodgings on Charles street. Tired with his night of dissipation he slept late, and it was two o'clock before he opened his eyes. His first thought

was that a slight refreshment in the shape of a certain alcoholic mixture, of which soda was one ingredient, would be beneficial, and he called a servant by means of a bell which was easily reached from where he lay.

"Mawnin', sah," said the colored boy. "What does yo' honah wish dis mawnin'?"

"I am afraid," responded Maybury, rising on one elbow, "that you are trifling with the truth, Thomas, in referring to the present time of day as one in which the sun has not yet passed the zenith."

The negro rolled his eyes until they seemed to be made entirely of white. Then he said "Yes, sah," five or six times, bowing profoundly at each word. It was evident that the expressions used were quite unintelligible to him.

"Quit that, you ebony jumping-jack!" cried Maybury, fearful that this performance was destined to go on indefinitely, "and inform me whether you can procure a decoction composed of one part eau de vie and three parts of some ærated liquid."

"Yes, sah; yo're quite right, sah," was all that this request drew from the retainer.

Douglass threw off the bedclothes and sat upright on the edge of the couch.

"You heathen, run out and bring me a siphon and a bottle of brandy. I must have a bracer before I put on my clothes."

Having now arrived at a plane where the darkey could comprehend his wants, the young man was not long in having them gratified. Mixing the drink himself, he swallowed a liberal quantity of it, and then stretched himself, in a large chair, while Thomas Jefferson, which was the name of the colored indi-

vidual who was his temporary valet, lathered his face and proceeded to shave it.

"I believe I saw you when I came in this morning?" said Maybury, with his face all suds.

"Yes, sah, I had de honah of openin' de do' for yo', sah."

"Well, Jeff, tell the truth; was I, or was I not, a sight?"

At this the negro grinned until the whiteness of his teeth rivalled that of his optics.

"No, sah," he answered, "you wa'n't so berry bad, sah. I'se seen yo' much wuss, sah."

"You lie!" said Maybury. "I was drunk as a fool!"

It is one of the pleasures of possessing money that one can address his inferiors in this manner, confident that so long as his "tips" are liberal no objection will be made to the form of amusement.

"You see," continued the judge's son, when he could speak again, "I had been to the ball of the Well-Known Gentlemen. I had drunk something like eight or ten quarts of champagne there, not to mention a few other things at the bar. But before I started to the hall I had something rather stiff; and after I left the hall, and had taken the lady to her hotel—"

He paused, wondering if he had not said more than was judicious.

"De lady, sah?" questioned Mr. T. Jefferson, waiting for him to proceed.

"Lady? Who said anything about any lady? I was remarking that on my way home I stopped in and took several nightcaps; and when I got into this room, as you know very well, I had a drink or

two more while you were undressing me. If you were a real honest nigger, Jeff, you'd admit that I looked like a Keeley Institute patient."

The colored man had only understood one word of this harangue, which he thought impugned his character.

"Honesty, sah? Do you doubt my honesty, Mr. Maybury?" he demanded, in a grieved tone.

Maybury lay back in the chair from which he had partly risen to observe his face better in the glass that hung opposite.

"I guess you'd better finish the shave, Jeff," he said, with a sort of resignation. "Metaphysics are lost on your cerebral development."

His silence was not broken again until he was nearly dressed and had donned his dressing-gown to await the production of his breakfast.

"What a night it was!" he reflected, when he had begun the repast, and was, by request, alone for the nonce. "It shows what varying moods a fellow is capable of in a few short hours. Let—me—see: At 11 o'clock I was sitting with Miss Scarlett in the French Opera House. At 11.15 I was waiting with her in the lobby for her carriage, her soft arm pressed close to mine and her pure face so near me that I could, but for the profanation, have kissed it. In those moments what resolutions of a changed life thronged my brain! What visions of a sweet fireside, a wife who should be the only woman on earth for me, a calm, serene existence such as the poets write of, an end to all the vapid, contemptible career I have so long followed! Had there been a time and place sufficient I should have told that girl then and there that I loved her; that I wanted

her promise to wed me; that I would be true to her as long as I had breath.

"This was 11.15. At 11.20, perhaps 11.25, she was driven away, and I walked to the club, wishing I had not made an agreement with Dilbach to go to that nauseating ball of which he had talked so much. Yes, it was at 11.35 that I walked into the club-house. I remember that was what the clock said over the mantel.

"From that hour till half-past one I might have made an interesting study for the angels. I was the one sinner that attracts more favorable comment in celestial circles that the ninety and nine just men who need no repentance. And then came Dilbach! Why the devil should Dilbach come? Men have been known before now to forget their engagements. If it had been anything but a confounded dance of the swell mob he would have been just as likely to forget it as not. Dilbach came; and he said—what *did* Dilbach say?—oh, yes! He said, 'Will you have a drink?' And I said—as anybody might have known I would say, 'Why, cert'nly.'"

Mr. Maybury yawned over his coffee at the recollection, and then returned to his reminiscences.

"We went to the ball, didn't we? We had some drinks at the bar, and then I saw Madge and the rest of them; and then that masked girl called me by my name—that masked girl who would not look at the quadrille. And the next thing, the other masked girl came up, the one who danced a can-can herself later in the morning. And I took both of them into the wine-room, where one of them drank like a fish—that is like a fish that liked champagne—and the other hardly touched the wine. Both of

them knew me, and I couldn't recognize either. I wasn't confused and took one girl for both, the difference in their actions proves that. But what a magnificent abandon the can-can dancer showed! By-the-way, I've got one of her garters somewhere. Yes, here it is, divinely blue, jewelled like that of a princess, large enough to satisfy a sculptor looking for a model."

The young man touched the article with a sort of reverence as he spoke, and examined it with care to see if he could discover anything like a monogram. There was nothing whatever. It was simply a handsome combination of silk elastic, metal and gems.

"After all, the other girl interested me most," he went on to say, laying down the bauble. "She is the one I should like best to meet, now that the excitement of the night is over and I can think with a perfectly clear head. What a delicious little thing she was, even with her features obscured by that miserable mask! There was every symptom of a real lady about her. In spite of the fact that she was at the ball, she evinced a modesty of deportment for which I shall praise her when I see her face to face. *When* I see her? Shall I *ever* see her? Will she redeem the half promise she made me on the Rue Royale, and send me word where I can have the ineffable pleasure of finding her?"

As there was no one present to answer the query he had propounded, young Mr. Maybury was obliged to dismiss the subject, though with regret. There were several letters on the mantel which he had not yet thought to open, and he began to tear the envelopes apart in an abstracted manner. The only one in the lot that he paid much attention to was in

the handwriting of Mr. David Bayley. He knew that Bayley was with the Scarletts, and was surprised that he had not sooner received a call from him. The letter announced that the Architect was at the Royal, and that the address of Mr. Maybury had only just been communicated to him. (The missive was dated on the previous evening.)

"I am full of Mardi Gras," said the letter, "as no doubt you are, and haven't a minute to spare to-night. Supposing we make an engagement to meet each other Wednesday evening at five o'clock at this house. My room is No. —. If no declination is received, I shall wait for you here."

Maybury was glad Bayley was so near. He remembered, with regret, that he had promised to go to meet the Scarletts on that very evening. What had recently occurred changed his entire train of thought in reference to that family. If he could have had the entire time with Bayley alone, how much pleasanter it would be! He looked at his watch, which had run down, and then at the clock, the hands of which indicated a quarter to four. Well, there would be time to see Dave for half an hour or so, and still keep the other engagement. Perhaps he would get some cue from the Architect as to whether there was any change in the lay of the land.

"I wish I wasn't such an ass!" exclaimed Maybury, with a disgusted look at his presentment in the mirror. "I'm about as fit to marry that innocent daughter of Scarlett's as I am to go to Heaven. And I'm as likely to ask her to have me the next time we meet as anything else. What 's the matter with me? Either of those fairies last night could have led me to

any lengths, had they had the mind. The one I saw home made a decided impression on my heart, too. And—Gracious Goodness !—she lives somewhere in that same Hotel Royal, where the Senator and Miss Flora and Dave Bayley reside ! For all I know I may run across her in the public hall !

"I wonder if I could tell anything by her gait or form. She would know me, at any rate, and unless she has an iron nerve she couldn't look me in the eye without giving some indication. But would she like to have me visiting other young ladies ? May she not have a streak of jealousy in her disposition ? She didn't seem like a girl who would shoot ; but one never can tell !

"Upon my word," added the young man, who was now laughing, "I had best get out of this town about as soon as the Lord will let me."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEVIL OF A MESS.

It was a little earlier than five when Maybury knocked at David Bayley's door, and was admitted with effusive delight by that gentleman. He had met no lady in the hall who was in the least likely to be his fair inamorata of the preceding night, but the fear—or hope, it was about evenly divided—that he might do so gave his face a sober look that at once attracted the attention of the Architect.

"What's the matter, Douglass ?" he exclaimed. "You look as if you had just come from a funeral."

"Oh, I'm in a devil of a mess!" was the reply. "Yes, women, of course. Why didn't you show up twenty-four hours ago and chaperon me through the most dangerous part of a New Orleans year?"

It was now the Architect's turn to look troubled.

"Tell me all about it," he said.

Without much circumlocution Mr. Maybury complied. As he finished, a broad smile crossed the lips of the Architect.

"You are taking it for granted that she is what she appeared," said he.

"Yes, I shall give her the benefit of every doubt as long as the question is open. Perhaps she will write to me and reveal herself."

"Perhaps she will. In the meantime what shall we do for the evening? There are a hundred things I want to say to you."

In making this last observation Mr. Bayley will not in the least deceive the reader, though he did Mr. Maybury. He knew perfectly well that his friend had made a promise to visit the Scarletts. When Douglass mentioned this fact the Architect elevated his eyebrows and listened to as much concerning the events at the French Opera House as the other chose to tell him.

"Miss Flora is not looking well," he commented. "It was hoped this journey would do wonders for her, but such is not the case. Dr. Parton, who is here, don't know what ails her."

"Parton here!" echoed Maybury.

"Yes," replied Bayley, in a significant tone. "The Senator sent for him. They don't want her to know it; the pretense is that his coming was a

personal matter—that he wanted to see the Carnival."

Mr. Maybury looked deeply interested.

"And what does he say?" he inquired.

"Oh, he thinks she needs something to excite and arouse her. She does nothing to stir her blood, which is stagnating. What *can* she do?" he asked. "She cares nothing for society; she has no companions; her father doesn't understand her any more than any one else."

Douglass Maybury was the picture of sympathy.

"Wealth doesn't always bring happiness, does it?" he remarked. "I wish these agitators who think money such a wonderful thing could change places for an hour with some of those they envy, just to see how quick they would want to change back?"

Mr. Bayley bowed, as if to say there was much truth in this observation. Then Mr. Maybury looked at his watch and said he would soon have to be going.

"When am I to see you?" inquired the Architect. "I suppose I shall have to return to New York in a day or two."

"I will call to-morrow. How is the palace getting on?"

"Finely. It will be ready to occupy in six weeks."

"Really! I had come to think it would never get beyond the stage known as 'nearing completion.'"

Mr. Bayley said there was no doubt that the furniture would be put into the new house by the middle of April. He alluded at some length to the elegance of the carpetings, the curtains and the other

things that had been ordered, mostly abroad, but Maybury showed only a languid interest. He stood with his hat in his hand, ready to go whenever his entertainer came to something that looked like a period. When he knocked at Mr. Scarlett's door, and had it opened by Arnold, the valet, he wore that bright hue which excitement always gave to his complexion.

The Senator was in a connecting room and lost little time in welcoming his guest. Coached by his factotum, the Architect, he avoided effusiveness, but acted the ordinary part of one glad to meet an acquaintance in an unexpected place. Maybury was soon entirely at his ease. The talk began on the Mardi Gras festivities, which Mr. Scarlett admitted he had seen little of this year, but which he had "done" thoroughly in bygone days. The processions, the decorations, the balls of the fashionable societies were discussed at length, but no allusion was made to the kind of entertainment given by such clubs as the "Well-Known Gentlemen." Maybury had no doubt the Senator had seen that identical thing in his time, but it was not the subject for discussion between a man and the father of one who might some day be his wife. For the young New-Yorker still considered Miss Scarlett as among the possibilities that the future had in store for him.

"And Miss Scarlett, I hope she is as well as usual?" he inquired, when a chance came to make the allusion.

"Not quite," responded the Senator. "The exhibition at the Opera House was a little too much for her, I fear. She has not been used of late to being out much at night. It is nothing serious,"

he added, perceiving the blank look of his companion, "nothing to cause any alarm; simply a little weariness, a mere warning to us to see that such an occurrence does not happen too frequently."

After a talk on this matter, which lasted five or ten minutes, Arnold came to inquire what time his employer would dine. The Senator said to Maybury that he took his meals at a restaurant in another part of the city, and, while it was undoubtedly inconvenient, he would be obliged to ask him to accompany him there. Learning that the hour was of no consequence to his guest, the Senator told his valet to send word to Miss May. When Arnold returned he said Miss Scarlett would be ready for the carriage at half-past seven.

It was in fact rather earlier when the Senator's daughter made her appearance, equipped for her ride. She bowed sweetly to Mr. Maybury, and took the hand which he held out to her. But she addressed most of her conversation to her father, as became a modest maiden, and only spoke to the other gentleman, after her first greeting, when he made a remark which rendered a reply necessary.

The dinner was a very good one, a fact which Maybury noticed, even with all the other things that he had on his mind. He had been dining mostly at another restaurant, and experienced a tinge of regret that he had not been to this place instead. When the meal was finished the Senator said he was sorry to announce that he had an engagement which would necessitate his going away for an hour or so. Would Mr. Maybury kindly escort Miss May to the hotel and await his return?

In the carriage there were temptations, but the

young man withstood them all. He could have reached across to the other seat and taken a little hand in his, that lay so bewitchingly in her lap. He could have said some very fetching things about her appearance, for in spite of her paleness Flora was wonderfully beautiful that evening. Instead, he spoke of the weather, and of the city, and of the new house that she was so soon to occupy in New York. And she answered him as if they were the merest acquaintances, and as if Mr. David Bayley had not said to both of them that they would make the greatest mistake in their lives if either married any one else.

Once in the private parlor the Scarletts occupied at the Royal, they were again alone. The young man found, as has many another before him, that it was exceedingly difficult to talk for an hour with a pretty girl and not say anything. He fell into compliments that he would fain have avoided; expressed a greater solicitude for her health than any one but a brother or a lover would have been justified in showing; evinced an interest in her likes and dislikes, in her plans, so far as she had any, and in herself generally, which would have misled another woman into supposing that he intended to ask her to name the day before he left the room. Nevertheless he did not quite commit himself.

Douglass Maybury had an almost irrepressible desire to say a number of things that he knew it would be sheer folly to utter. What would be the use, for instance, in confiding to this creature, stainless in thought as she was in act, that he feared himself morally unfit to mate with one so pure and good. And that was exactly what he wanted her to know.

He wanted her to realize that he was far from the ideal of what a man ought to be, and see whether, with this information to influence her, she would still act as she had done toward him.

Maybury was in a quandary. He wanted Flora to know these things, and yet he did *not* want her to know them. He wished to ascertain what she would do if she suspected the guilty things he had done —to see what she would say in case she ever found them out. As he had told the Architect, he believed marriage would not cure him of his bad habits. He had no confidence that he had shrewdness enough to conceal everything from a wife. What would this girl do if he reeled into her room at six in the morning, fresh from a gay party, including, perhaps, people of both sexes?

When Senator Scarlett returned, the attitude in which the young people were found demonstrated to him that nothing special had passed between. Maybury ascertained that Mr. Scarlett intended to remain two or three days more in the Crescent City, and promised to call again before he left town.

"Well, my dear?" asked the father, anxiously, when he was alone with his child.

She shook her head in a way that was quite as eloquent as words.

"He seemed very agreeable, though," sighed the Senator.

She bowed in acknowledgment that she coincided with him.

"He will come home in the summer," continued Mr. Scarlett, encouragingly, "and during the watering-place season all will be arranged."

The girl's fair brow contracted with wrinkles.

"If we had never begun this," she said, in a low tone, "I would not begin now. I could have learned to endure one of the others, perhaps, as easily as him."

The father hemmed several times, as if to clear his throat of something that stuck in it tenaciously.

"It is the only time I have ever tried to influence you," he said. "And even in this, my child, you must not let me overbalance your own judgment."

"Oh, the reasons are all on one side, of course," she replied. "He has Family, and we have Money. It is a common arrangement enough. I am not finding any fault. Feeling as I do this spring, marriage has not many charms for me; but I shall probably be better before a great while."

He reminded her of what Dr. Parton had said—that she needed something to rouse her—upon which she interrupted him with a light laugh.

"Do you think," she asked, "that marriage would have that effect? All the women I have noticed grew duller and duller after the wedding-day. If I had a purpose in life, now, like Charles—"

She stopped, laughing again, for it was evident that her brother's purpose in life had never made him particularly lively. Then she ceased the whole conversation abruptly and kissed her father good-night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARRIAGE IS SOMETIMES A CURE.

The intention of Douglass Maybury to proceed toward California was not carried out exactly as he anticipated. The week that followed his last described evening with the Scarletts proved one of the most important of his life, and its events changed the entire course of his future.

The first shock awaited him in a large envelope that was handed him the next morning, bearing upon it the printed request that if not delivered within five days it should be returned to Blackstone Coke, Esq., New York. Maybury had written to Mr. Coke for more money, thinking it best to have enough with him at the outset of a journey whose end he could not foresee. He took up the envelope languidly, and opened it with a knife that lay on the stand at the head of his bed, for he had not yet risen. But instead of the letter of credit he found a check for a much smaller sum, and a personal note to the following effect:

"DOUGLASS MAYBURY, ESQ.,

"Dear Sir:—

"I find on examining your account that the sums you have drawn do not leave the balance which you request me to forward to you at New Orleans. I therefore send a check for what remains—two hundred and eleven dollars, forty-five ($211.45)—which I think you will find no trouble in cashing. Use this letter, if necessary, at the Union Bank. I

shall be glad to show you the entire account whenever you are in the city.

"Very Resp'fully,
"B. COKE.

For some minutes the young man sat upright in bed, staring at the missive he had read. Penniless! And without the least forewarning! He had supposed he had enough to last two or three years yet; and at all events he had felt sure Mr. Coke would give him ample notice when his funds began to draw to a close.

Penniless! "Dead broke," in the vernacular to which he was accustomed. His purse was about empty. The amount of this check would no more than pay what he owed in the Crescent City. He was a pauper. Ugh! What a horrible sensation it was!

He took up the check again and re-read the Liliputian figures. He could have crammed that bit of paper down the throat of Blackstone Coke with a good will. It was lucky for the legal light that New York was a very long way from New Orleans. What had become of the seventy thousand dollars his father had left him? Coke had stolen it, of course! A thieving, sneaking old fox of a lawyer, he had done as he pleased because there was no one to watch him. And to cap the climax of his villainy by sending this beastly check, too small to buy a decent coffin in which to be buried! Maybury swore to himself until the walls of the room should have been obscured with the fumes of sulphur.

But, after he had called his servant and donned his clothing, he had to admit, disagreeable as it was,

that Coke might have been a thoroughly honest man. He had been told, long before, that some of the securities which made up the sum his father appeared to have left were of inflated stocks, which would be worth much less if sold at their true value. The trustee had never refused to honor all calls and during some years they had been undoubtedly large.

The only thing that still angered the young man, when he became calmer, was the fact that he had not been told when the sum due him reached a much larger figure—when it got down, for instance, to a couple of thousand dollars. He might, for all Coke knew, have started on a trip to California, to Japan, or to Egypt. A nice fix he would have been in, would he not, if left in some foreign country without a sou! And yet, was he much better off in the United States, if it came to that? Was this a place, more than any other, where a man could get along without the coin of the realm?

Then it dawned on him what this poverty meant. He could no longer coquette with his destiny. He had but two alternatives—to marry or starve. Upright in his money dealings as it was possible for any man to be, he would not have borrowed enough to buy a mutton-chop without knowing where repayment was provided. Yesterday he had discussed the Scarlett family in an airy vein, thinking that first he would, and then that he would not, propose for the hand of Miss Flora. To-day no choice was left.

There were, to be sure, other girls ready to accept if he chose to ask. He thought over the list, troubled as he saw how the circle narrowed to this one at the Hotel Royal. He would have preferred

Miss De Cook to death, but the choice was hardly perceptible. The eldest Fitz Robinson was coarse and bony. There was something the matter with the entire list.

Miss Scarlett was young and pretty. Her fortune was the largest of them all. He would have to shut his eyes to every other consideration, and take the plunge.

It was mean, though. He was no fitter for her than he ever had been. There was no probability that he ever would be. The only salve for his conscience was the open way in which the Senator had encouraged him, and this should not be charged to the poor child, so sweetly innocent of all the wiles of a wicked world. He tried to quiet his inward monitor by the reflection that what he was going to do some one did every month in the year. Marriage had ceased to be a sacred thing in fashionable circles. It was a matter *de convenance*, and he was no worse than the rest. Was he going to begin at this late day to preach virtue? Certainly nothing could be more ridiculous.

He had a preference for straightforward ways, when they would serve just as well, and the first thing he did, after his coffee, was to seek out Mr. Bayley. This astute individual was in his room, expecting this very visitor, for the best of reasons. He also had received an envelope that morning bearing the card of Mr. Blackstone Coke. Mr. Coke did a great deal more business for Senator Scarlett than he had ever done for Mr. Maybury. It had been an easy task to learn from him the exact state of the affairs of the Judge's son. The Architect had been informed of the precise size of the check that

Douglass had received, and of the fact that it was the very last penny he had in the world. This was the play of the card that he was awaiting, that had made him persuade Mr. Scarlett and his daughter to linger in New Orleans after the Carnival was over. It was quite clear to him what course events would take when Douglass had exhausted the last of his resources.

"Glad to see you!" cried the Architect, pretending not to notice the dispirited looks of his caller. "I was just going to send over a messenger, to tell you I should call before noon. It's more than likely I shall have to say good-bye to you and start for New York this evening."

Maybury picked up a cigar that lay in a case on the table and lit it mechanically.

"Is that so?" he said, to gain time.

Then, while the Architect rattled on, he smoked himself into a greater calmness.

"Yes, the furnishers are wild about things, and vow I must come on at once. There is a small war raging among them. The fellow who has done the parlor sofas and chairs declares that their effect will be ruined by the rugs another chap is putting in. The paper-hanger writes me that his work is all spoiled in the music-room by the color of the pianos, which are rosewood when they should be mahogany. The marble-work in Miss Flora's bathroom is dragging, and the largest candelabra has not been invoiced yet. When I once get on the ground I will break a few of their heads, for the Senator is set on getting into the house. He has seen three years go by, and he wants to get some pleasure out of his money."

The young man took his cigar out of his mouth,

"Well, I sha'n't get much out of mine," he remarked quietly. "This morning old Coke, the lawyer, sent me the last of it."

"The deuce!" said Bayley, simulating surprise. "The *very last* of it, do you mean? The end of everything he had of yours?"

"*Le dernier sou.* I'm the poorest man you know, Dave. The main reason I'm smoking this cigar of yours is because I haven't enough to buy one."

Mr. Bayley put his hands in his pantaloons pockets, and spread his legs apart, as many men do when they are thinking deeply.

"Oh, well," he said presently. "It really doesn't make any difference—*to you.* There are plenty of fortunes to be had for the asking, with a bride thrown in."

Mr. Maybury scowled.

"All I object to is the rider," he said.

The Architect went to the window and looked down on St. Louis street.

"My dear Douglass," he said, on returning, "I've said all I can, long before to-day. If I were to talk a year I could add nothing."

"But she—Miss Scarlett—is not well," stammered Maybury. "It would be a very inopportune time to propose marriage to a girl who is made ill by an evening at the Opera House."

Bayley eyed him with an air of pity.

"Ignorant youth," he replied, "do you not know that marriage is sometimes the most effective cure in the entire materia medica? I knew a girl engaged for seven years to an estimable man, who never seemed to get quite ready to ask her to name the wedding-day. At last she became ill and for months

lay in bed, unable to rise more than a few moments at a time. The unhappy lover, feeling that her days were numbered, begged his mother to allow her to be taken to her house, where she could receive better nursing than at the place where she boarded. The mother, with Puritanic instinct, shrank from this proposition, saying that marriage should precede such a close relation. Driven to desperation, the man called a clergyman and the words were said at the bedside that made the couple one. The bride was then carried to her husband's home on pillows, every one fearing that the short journey of two miles or less would prove fatal. Six weeks later I saw that woman in her husband's carriage, waiting for him in front of a store, looking as well and feeling as well—she herself admitted—as any one in the city.* She had proved the efficacy of the treatment which I am sure Dr. Parton, when consulted, will heartily recommend for Miss Flora."

Maybury shivered. It was diabolical—this marrying without love, with no object but to replenish an empty purse. But it would have to be done. There was no other way.

"Remember one thing, even if it does sound a trifle cold-blooded," pursued Mr. Bayley. "A husband has an interest in the estate of his wife, should he survive her. In any case, therefore, your marriage would settle your financial affairs for the rest of your life."

Douglass was not as ashamed to listen to this as he felt he ought to be. He thought it time now to put a bold front on the whole matter. He was going

* I also knew of this case.—A. R.

to marry for money—but that was not the worst of it. There were women whose cash he could have acquired in this way with hardly a tinge of conscience; warm-blooded, corn-fed lassies, who could give and take, with whom he could quarrel and make up, and whose angry eyes he could face if they had occasion to complain of his misdemeanors. It was the fact that the bride chosen for him—he could hardly be said to have chosen her for himself—was so transparently pure and innocent, that drove him almost out of his head when he thought of the injustice he was going to commit. If such a girl discovered her great mistake after wedding him, she never would utter a word of reproach, but her blue eyes, filled with silent tears, would strike him to the heart and hurt a thousand times worse than a dagger. It would not do to think of it. He must marry her, and the questions now were only of preliminaries.

"You're my friend, Dave," he said, "if I've got one, and I want you to tell me just what to do. I—I'll ask—her father—this very day, and have that over with. Then I'll speak to her, say to-morrow—I don't want the thing hanging for a month or two, if it's got to be done. And what do you say about the time? Shall I leave it to her to put it off as long as she likes, or had I better urge a nearer date? This sort of thing is entirely new to me, you know."

The Architect hummed a tune that meant to imply joviality.

"I'm as much a bachelor as yourself," he said, "and quite as little used to making proposals of marriage. But if I were going into this matter, as I understand you are, I'd get up a prettier smile than the one which at this present moment disfigures

your countenance. You don't want to walk in on the old man with an expression which seems to say, 'I suppose I've *got* to do this, but, by the Lord, I *hate* it!' You must brace up, if it takes a quart of whiskey, and act as if you craved matrimony above all things. Then, when he's given his consent that you should speak to the young lady, you will buy cloves enough to disguise your breath, and talk to her in the style we read of in books. And, about the time? Well, if I were you, I'd bear in mind that a bird in the hand is worth a dozen in the chaparral. I'd get a promise that the ceremony should take place before the end of next June, and a month earlier would be better yet."

It required two days for Maybury to get up his courage, however, during which Mr. Bayley considerately waited, and Senator Scarlett stayed, for no apparent reason, in the City of the Crescent. And even at the end of this time the young man did not present his cause by word of mouth. He did it with pen and ink, a happy thought of the Architect, as a means out of the difficulty, and also to make a more certain entanglement, should the suitor think afterward of changing his mind. The letter which was sent was a very nice piece of literary composition, as indeed it should be, when two fairly educated men devoted themselves to it for a whole evening. It would have made about a page of this novel, if reduced to print; and it recited in phrase neither too delicate nor too bold the story it was meant to tell.

Mr. Scarlett, whose hopes of this consummation had sometimes wavered, in spite of his trust in the eminent abilities of Mr. Bayley, read this letter with

a light heart and went without delay to show it to his daughter.

"At last!" he cried, as he entered the room. "Mr. Maybury has sent in writing a request that he may ask you for your hand."

Miss Flora took the document which he handed her, and after perusing it for a few moments, suddenly burst into tears.

"My dear child," exclaimed her father, overcome at the sight, "if this is not agreeable to you, let me answer him to that effect. I have no wish so great as to see you happy."

The girl wiped the tears away, and recovered herself quickly.

"It is not that," she answered, "for I am very glad this has turned out as you wish. But,"—she hesitated for some time—"there is to be no haste, *is* there? I shall be permitted to wait—just as long as I think wise?"

He assured her that there was no doubt on this score. All he asked was that the engagement should be published as soon as made. The wedding might be postponed until the middle of the summer—even till autumn—if she insisted upon it.

"Perhaps I shall want to make it much later," she smiled, to take away the effect of her weeping.

"It will certainly be left entirely to you," he answered, confident that this mood would not be lasting.

As the matter had been broached to him in writing, the Senator replied in the same manner, courteously giving his permission for Mr. Maybury to address his daughter, and even adding that he had his best wishes for success. This letter Douglass

found in his room when he came home from one of the clubs about midnight, and he read it with a grave face.

The night was rather warm and. after undressing, the young man partially opened the shutters that covered the windows of his room. A solitary figure was passing along the pavement on the opposite side of the way, and something about it attracted his attention. Surely he had seen that form before, that athletic but rather uncouth body, that gait which would be described as "slouching," were it not so powerful.

"Austin Strange!" exclaimed Maybury, below his breath.

It could be none other. What was he doing in New Orleans? Why was Esther's brother at midnight, opposite that house, a thousand miles from the city where he belonged.

CHAPTER XIX.

"ESTHER STRANGE! GOOD GOD!"

These were the questions that assailed Douglass Maybury, driving from his eyes whatever sleep might have come to them but for the solitary figure that had passed on the opposite side of the way.

Austin had never seemed like a brother to Esther. Mr. Coke was authority for the statement that when she left for school he had shown not the least interest. The father had closed his mouth firmly, like

one who goes through a disagreeable experience with the least possible display. The stepmother had been affected to tears, after the manner of women. Esther had given evidence of the greatest self-command, though she was evidently affected by the prospect of such an entire change in her existence. But Austin—he did nothing but stare. When she said farewell to him—he on the opposite side of the room, from which he did not move—he responded as one might say good-afternoon to a casual visitor. Stolidity—that expressed his attitude, according to Mr. Coke.

The idea that Esther might be with him did not seem tenable. They had nothing in common. Beside, the girl was, of course, at her school, hundreds of miles to the north. What, then, could be the errand of the carpenter? Maybury, though not ordinarily given to curiosity, wished heartily that he knew.

Had he come to see the festivities of Mardi Gras? That was perfectly absurd. It was doubtful if he had ever heard before of such a thing as the Carnival. Perhaps some one had hired him to shadow the man who had aspirations to the hand of the millionaire's daughter. Nonsense! How could that dolt know enough to shadow anybody! It was a wonder he had been able to get there with the requisite number of car changes.

A bright thought! Perhaps David Bayley would be able to offer a solution to the riddle. Maybury went to sleep with this idea in mind. He would tell Bayley about it. But the next day, when he saw the Architect, the greater matter made him forget the less.

"Well, it's done," he said, as the Architect looked at him inquiringly. "At least, the Senator has answered my letter and told me I have his blessing."

A pleasant smile, arranged for the occasion, illumined Mr. Bayley's face.

"A thousand congratulations," he murmured. "And to-day, I suppose, you will learn your fate from the fair girl herself?"

Douglass shrugged his shoulders. He had not much doubt of what the "fair girl" would say, though it did not seem gracious to tell that to Bayley.

"It's something like joining a lodge, isn't it?" he replied. "First I apply for admission—through you; then a committee reports on my eligibility—that's Scarlett; then I'm balloted for by the lodge in council,—that's Miss Flora. What if I should get black-balled?"

Bayley shook his head, with a wise expression.

"She loves you too well for that," he said.

An expression of deep pain crossed the handsome features of the other.

"I wish she didn't," he muttered. "I never can come up to her expectations, Dave. There will be the devil to pay, sooner or later."

For the next hour the Architect combated this notion. He enlarged on the freedom of modern marriage, especially in "high life," where the husband and wife are at liberty to live their own existences.

"If you were a mechanic," he said, "where you had to share three rooms with her, you would constantly run the risk of jars and trouble. In a house like that I am furnishing you need only meet when you are

both good-natured. It is a great thing to have separate apartments. I pity the man who cannot get out of bed without falling over a pile of hoop-skirts and corsets, or come in a little late without seeing a night-capped figure sitting upright at his pillow, inquiring where he has been. In planning the new mansion I took it into account that Miss Scarlett would ultimately marry, and that she would probably live with her husband in that house, big enough for a hotel and grand enough for a queen. Once, when you were there, I took you into the suite she was to occupy. Had you been in a better frame of mind I would have shown you yours."

"Mine!" gasped Douglass.

"Yes, as it has turned out. The suite that her husband should have is on the same floor as hers, separated only by a hallway that can be used or discarded at will. It has four rooms, which may be denominated parlor, study, bedroom and bath. If monsieur comes in late at night he can enter without his wife's having the least idea when he returns. Between his suite and hers there are two doors at some distance apart, which can be locked on both sides! If he wishes to visit madame, he must pass through the corridor. In short, he is as independent of unwished-for visitors as the Grand Mogul."

Maybury grew paler as he heard this extended description. Every inducement was to be held out to him, it seemed, to do as he ought not. But he would never let those opportunities influence him. No, he would be true to that lovely girl, in act and thought, if he ever had the happiness to call her his wife. This he did not care to say to Bayley. Fearing that he would not look well in the rôle of a sen-

timentalist, he received what his friend said in the most discreet silence.

Convinced that he ought not to delay too long in seeking an interview with his future bride, he wrote her a brief note early in the afternoon, saying that he hoped to find her at home that evening, when, he added significantly, he wished the pleasure of seeing her alone. It was nine o'clock when he called, giving time for the dinner to be over, and for the Senator to take a run out to the residence of the mayor, for whom he had conceived a warm liking. Miss Flora met him with her old sweetness and cordiality, and for an hour they talked of nothings, after the way of people who postpone as long as possible the thing that is nearest their hearts.

But at last he came to it. I do not intend to give in detail the words he used nor make a verbal report of her replies. It is enough to say that he proposed for her hand and was accepted, with the stipulation that the time for the marriage must not be fixed at present, must, in fact, be left entirely to her. She gave as a partial reason her ill-health and also pleaded her youth and her comparatively slight acquaintance with the more important affairs of life. She would be his wife, yes. She was bound to him by a solemn compact which she would consider sacred; but he must not hasten the day unduly.

And to this he agreed, no more in haste than she. And they sat there till a late hour, talking of the things that come naturally with matrimonial projects, their voices hushed. And he had been gone for some time, and was again in the quiet of his own room, when it occurred to him that he had not kissed

her once, that he had not even taken her hand a single moment in his own!

There had certainly been no time when either of those acts seemed the proper thing to do. He had not thought of them in any part of the momentous interview. Miss Scarlett had been so calmly reserved, had met his requests so frankly, with no pretense, or dropping of the eyelids, or hectic flushes, or palpitating breast. He had never offered marriage to a girl before, but he had formed ideas from novels and theatres that she might exclaim, "O, Douglass!" and do a number of other things quite opposite to Flora's.

When he was saying the fateful words she looked him as steadily in the eyes as if he were asking her to go up the river on a pleasure trip. He knew she would have looked and acted precisely the same had she felt it best to tell him "no" instead of "yes." There was never a girl more direct and truthful in every thought and deed. He could not doubt that she cared a great deal for him. She had chosen him, with her father's advice, out of all the men on earth, and she might have had almost any one. It was not romantic, and the marriage would probably be uneventful. But, under all the circumstances, would it not be better so?

The object of the mission to New Orleans being now accomplished, there was no reason why the Senator should longer remain away from Washington, where his presence was wanted by his party on a vote that might be a close one. He therefore said to his daughter and to Mr. Bayley that the sooner they set out for the North the better, to which they both agreed. A consultation with the Architect

was productive of another decision, of some importance to the future son-in-law. Mr. Maybury received one morning the following letter :

"My Dear Douglass:

"There is no need of circumlocution between us. I wish to make you comfortable in a pecuniary way, pending your marriage. If you will permit me to do so, I will place a sum with your attorney, Mr. Coke, sufficient to enable you to live as befits your condition, and no one but ourselves need be the wiser. Henceforth I shall look upon you as my son, and trust you will honor me with equal regard.

"Another matter. We intend to start for Washington to-morrow evening, and trust you will make one of the party. Then, if it meets your views, an announcement of your engagement can be put into the newspapers there.

"Truly Your Friend,

"Augustus Scarlett."

Maybury saw no objection at all to accepting the money. Indeed he was much relieved that it was to some in this way, for he had begun to wonder just how he should raise a loan for temporary use. But he did not like to have anything more to do with Blackstone Coke, if he could help it ; and in his reply he suggested to Mr. Scarlett that he would prefer the money placed with Littleton Chitty, Esq., of No. —, Broadway, if it was all the same to him. This being satisfactory, the arrangement was made, and Mr. Chitty was nearly thrown into a fit, a few days later, by receiving an express package containing $10,000 in cash and $240,000 in securities, with an order to place them to the account of Douglass Maybury, and to keep the transaction secret, even from his office clerks. His copy of the *Home Journal* with an elaborate and highly ornate announcement of the

engagement, explained things, however, and the next time he met Maybury he showed no indication of knowing anything whatever about him that was new or peculiar.

Maybury was obliged to make one more visit to Mr. Coke's office, and he did so the very day after arriving at New York, two weeks from the time he left New Orleans. It occurred to him that the closing of his account must finish the remittances to Esther Strange, and he wondered if she had been in any way inconvenienced. Mr. Coke told him, with his usual dignity, that he had honored the last bill received from the managers of the institution where Miss Strange was quartered, and that, under ordinary circumstances, another would arrive in a few days.

"What did you intend to do with such a bill?" inquired Douglass, growing hot under the collar.

"I presume the natural course would be to send it to you."

"Knowing that I probably would not have a cent to meet it with?"

"That is hardly my business," said Mr. Coke. "Besides — excuse me — are you not soon to be married?"

It was difficult to keep from taking that old man by the hair.

"That certainly is *not* your business," said Douglass, with spirit. "If you receive any bills for me hereafter, you will oblige by forwarding them to Mr. Littleton Chitty, who now has charge of my affairs."

It would have been less painful to the old lawyer had Maybury assaulted him. Chitty was a former

clerk, who had of late taken quite a number of his best customers from him. Between the men there were the most bitter feelings. Coke turned several unbecoming colors as he heard the news, and his enemy was well avenged.

Fearing, however, that the bills for Esther's schooling might get "lost" between the rival offices, Mr. Chitty was told to send word to the principal of the change in paymasters, and he had also to be informed of the entire scheme by which Esther was made to believe herself the beneficiary of some unknown philanthropist. With the wisdom of a true lawyer, Mr. Chitty did not look in the least surprised, nor give one wink of either eyelash during the somewhat novel explanation.

"Let — me — see," said Douglass, meditatively. "Please tell me my exact balance?"

He had drawn very little so far, and Mr. Chitty was able to inform him a second later that he had $9,275 in the Second National bank to his credit.

"And then, of course," he added, "there are the securities, you know, all of them easily convertible at any time."

Maybury nodded, and said he had forgotten the exact amount of the latter. When he heard that it was $240,000 he came very near fainting in his surprise. He had never dreamed of such a sum, and wondered as he walked out whether he could really be worth so much to anybody as the Senator seemed to think.

He went into an adjacent wine-room and drank something to steady his nerves. The liquor gave him confidence. It went directly to his bump of self-esteem. In half an hour he had come to think

that the value Mr. Scarlett had set on him was, on the whole, rather low.

Strolling across Madison Square he met Chitty, who stopped him with an affable, but by no means familiar smile.

"I forgot to ask you," said the lawyer, "how much I am to pay out on account of the lady who is attending the boarding-school."

"The lady!" exclaimed Douglass. "Oh, you mean the child! That is a matter which I leave entirely to her teachers. There is to be no limit whatever."

The disgusted Mr. Coke could not bear to have the Chitty office triumph over his without striking back in some way. Thus far he had kept the secret of Esther's real friend from every one not entitled to know. His only questionable conduct toward Douglass had been letting Mr. Bayley into the exact condition of the young man's finances, and apprising him when his property reached its last gasp. Now he began to fear that the influence which his late client had in the Scarlett household would result in taking the whole of the Senator's legal business out of his hands and conveying it into those of his hated rival. With this alarm upon him he called on Mr. Bayley and revealed, haltingly and after some urging, all that he knew of the matter of the young girl.

The Architect was unquestionably interested. He heard the story with the utmost attention.

"How did you happen to come to me with this?" he asked, when he had the whole of it in his possession.

"Why, you brought me to the notice of the Senator,

and I knew you were high in his good will and confidence. This is a matter that you ought to know, now that the engagement of his daughter to Mr. Maybury is announced."

Mr. Bayley looked very thoughtful.

"You know of nothing else between them?" he said, interrogatively. "Come, do not hesitate to tell me, if you do."

"I do not *know* of anything," answered the lawyer, shrewdly, "but—is it likely—you understand the world—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," was the quick reply. "Leave this matter entirely to me, Mr. Coke. If you mention it to another soul it will spoil everything."

The lawyer promised, and hoped Mr. Bayley would continue to be his friend with Mr. Scarlett. He said Mr. Maybury had withdrawn his business from him, presumably on account of his action in not notifying him when his funds were getting low, according to Mr. Bayley's request. The Architect promised to do all he could, and the lawyer departed, half convinced that he would have done about as well to remain away.

"Esther Strange!" exclaimed Bayley, aloud, when he was alone again. "Esther Strange! Good God!"

CHAPTER XX.

MISS SCARLETT PROPOSES MARRIAGE.

A wedding tour is supposed to be almost a necessity in circles that expect to be dignified by the name of fashionable. It may be to Europe and it may be to a nearer point, but it must be to some place at a distance from the homes of the "happy couple." To settle down in the house where they are to live immediately after the ceremony that unites them is to the last degree bourgeois. And yet the son of Judge Maybury and the daughter of Senator Scarlett did exactly this thing.

The time for the wedding was set with surprising suddenness to begin with. The engagement, it will be remembered, was entered into with the stipulation on the part of the lady that she was to be allowed to name the day. Maybury, after he found himself in possession of a comfortable fortune, paid in advance, was not in the least haste to deliver the goods contracted for. He called upon Miss Flora two or three times a week, went to ride with her in the Park, accompanied her with her father and Madame Saccard to the theatre, and acted generally as an engaged young man should act, except that his personal relations with her never passed beyond the cordiality to be found among very good friends. He reached his wedding-day without ever having offered to kiss her; but there seemed nothing remarkable to him in that. She was not the sort of woman one fumbles and crushes.

The spring entirely passed away and the watering-place season was at its height. Saratoga was a favorite resort of the Senator, and for several years he had retained the same suite of rooms at the Grand Union. This year Flora was with him there part of the time, though the new mansion on Fifth avenue was visited by her nearly every week, for one reason and another. Her days were, in fact, about equally divided between the two places. As of yore, she did exactly as she pleased. When she traveled her maid and Mme. Saccard were always with her. And she also had to some extent the services of a new retainer of the family, a young man who bought the tickets and saw that the carriage was ready, and did the sort of things for her that Arnold, the valet, did for her father.

The name of this young man was Austin Strange.

Flora was not yet by any means well. Her doctor said so and her appearance confirmed his opinion. She was apt to grow faint in unexpected places, and then it was convenient to have a strong youth at hand who could support her with his arm. More than once Austin carried her bodily up the front steps of her house when the arrival was at night, for by daylight she would rather have endured the slow support of the domestics than been seen in this predicament. She was a girl of tender heart, unwilling that any one should suffer on her account. Time and again she said to Mme. Saccard or Margot, "Austin is stronger than you; I think you had best let him help me. And the young man was so gentle, so careful, so willing, that they all agreed with her that it was best to let him bear the heavy loads.

It was a rather peculiar transposition from the

bench of a wood-carver to this situation, but in America these things happen frequently. Flora had noticed the youth at his work, during the years when her father's house was being built, and had grown to fancy him. After the last nail was driven she spoke to Mr. Bayley about him. They were talking in relation to her illness, and the need of some reliable person of the other sex to accompany Mme. Saccard and Margot whenever she traveled. Mr. Bayley had offered to try to find a suitable young man, and had said he would advertise in the newspapers, wording the announcement in such a way that applicants would not know for whose service they were required. It was then that Flora seemed possessed with a sudden thought, and mentioned the name of the carpenter.

Mr. Bayley said at first that he knew the young man very well, but doubted his capacity for the position. But when she brought to his mind the reliability Austin had displayed, his unvarying politeness, and, above all, his supreme quality of taciturnity, the Architect ceased to object, and said he would take pleasure in speaking to him. The fact that Miss Scarlett had set her mind upon the youth was quite enough for him, and his pretended hesitation was only to make her feel that she had convinced him unwillingly. Most people, if you ever thought of it, like to believe they have shown the best of an argument.

Austin appeared as stolid as ever when the Architect went to him with his offer. How much was he to receive? That was the first question he asked, and it gave evidence of being the only one he cared to propound. This being settled, on a liberal basis,

there was no more to be said. He had as lief assist in the care of a lady as anything else, so long as he was well paid for it. It would be a change; and he could return to his trade at any time.

The only person who did not like the new *metier* of the carpenter was Charles Scarlett. He had been rather intimate with the Strange family—father and son—and had passed a good many evenings at their residence, still in the flat where we first found them. There is always something different in the position of a personal servant from that of a mechanic or clerk. With all his liberal ideas, Charles could not help wishing his friend had not accepted a place which, in his opinion, lowered him. He was as affable as ever after Austin entered upon his new occupation, but all intimacy ceased between them. Try as he might he could not feel toward the courier as he had toward the independent artisan.

As for Austin he did not mind this; did he mind anything? He attended to his new duties, which were light enough, took his wages and closed his mouth. When Miss Flora had need of him he was always at her service. When she had none he went his way, or remained in his own room, working on a piece of wood that he kept for practice. His taste in carving was undoubtedly good, and his liking for tools was the only pronounced trait he evinced.

It was not the idea of Senator Scarlett that his daughter's marriage should be postponed indefinitely. While he wanted to make the time agreeable to her, he knew very well that there were many slips between the cup and the lip. He learned—through Bayley—that Mr. Maybury's diffidence was due to a request of Flora's and that, while in no haste himself,

he was willing to leave the matter entirely to her, as he had agreed. Seeing that the pressure must therefore be brought entirely upon his daughter he began, as gently as possible, to urge the setting of a definite date. This was during the month of August, when she was with him at the Grand Union.

But this the girl could not be persuaded to do. Her health, she said—and Dr. Parton indorsed her statement—was very irregular. On Monday she might be as red as a rose, and on the following Thursday as pale as a water-lily. Her father, she reminded him, had secured her consent to the engagement by the express stipulation that he would ask no haste.

To this the Senator protested that he had no intention to push matters. If a date was only agreed upon and announced, even if it was as late as November or December, he would be quite content. Once, when he had argued with her on this point longer than usual, and perhaps with more warmth, she burst into tears and he was in a state of distress. He went to Mr. Bayley and revealed what had taken place, and the Architect agreed with him, very unwillingly, that nothing more could be done at present.

Then, when no one expected it, there came a sudden change. Within two weeks from the day Flora had declared that the next December would be a too early date for her wedding, she came to her father of her own accord and told him she was ready to obey his wishes. He began to protest that he had entirely altered his mind, and to admit that her health was not good enough, but she stopped him.

She had thought it all over, and he was right.

She wanted to be married, and without unnecessary delay. In October? No, in September. As early in the month as possible. And she did not want a formal wedding, either. She wished the quietest kind of a ceremony.

Indulgent as Augustus Scarlett had always been with his daughter, it was some time before he could bring himself to consent to this arrangement. He had imagined the finest wedding that New York had ever seen, such as might befit the heiress of millions, followed by a reception to which all of the upper ten thousand would be obliged to come. The prestige of the bridegroom, if not the wealth of the bride, would have filled his palace with representatives of the first families of the country. The wedding-day would have been the proudest he had ever known since he walked out of his father's hovel with all his worldly goods in a small package under his arm. But Flora was accustomed to having her way and he could do nothing with her. She *would* be married quietly, and she would *not* be married any other way.

"Have you consulted Mr. Maybury?" asked the Senator, in desperation. "Are you certain he is willing to dispense with all ostentation on such a momentous occasion?"

"Mr. Maybury," said Flora, turning slightly paler, "regards this matter too much in the light of a business venture to hold any opinions contrary to mine."

Mr. Scarlett's cheek also lost its color as he heard these words.

"You wrong him," he began. "He loves you devotedly. He—"

"Will do as I wish," she interrupted, as if weary

of the conversation. "I have written to him. He will arrive to-night. Do not put any obstacles in our way. Quiet weddings are not unprecedented. That's a good papa, say no more about it."

The natural place for the Senator to go with such a matter was to the office of Mr. David Bayley and he repaired thither with dispatch. Miss Flora had, however, anticipated this move, and prepared the Architect for it. After hearing, as if for the first time, the news which the Senator brought, Mr. Bayley affected an attitude of deep interest, and relapsed into silent meditation for several minutes. Emerging at last he gave it as his opinion that the young lady was the one most interested, and that it would be unwise to attempt to control her actions. The ill-health of the bride would answer all questions as to the reason for leaving the beaten paths. When Mr. Scarlett left his adviser he went straight to Flora and told her he would do as she wished.

Mr. Maybury had become quite used to being engaged. The more he had seen of his fiancée the better he had learned to like her. He had come to an early conclusion that she would not be the most disagreeable woman in the world. He believed he could endure a good deal of that pretty face, that sweet voice, those delicate ways. He had had his time at wild living, why not settle down into a model, home-loving husband? He would have wealth enough, in all conscience, not a bad thing to consider. She would not be likely to hold him by a severe chain, like a woman who was all passion. He could still belong to his clubs, and get an occasional evening with the "boys," so as not to break off everything too suddenly.

He used to think of these things as he came and went, that spring and summer, to pay her irregular visits. But when he received word that his time had come, he had a brief fright, like a prisoner who is aroused from sleep and told that the guillotine is prepared.

Miss Scarlett's letter was not in the least ambiguous. It seemed the height of frankness, a quality that he admired above all others in her.

"You have left the date of our marriage to me," she said, in effect, "and I have postponed it in the hope that I should fully recover my health before giving myself to you. That hope grows no more likely to be realized as the time passes away. I have therefore concluded that we had best wait no longer. As soon as you are ready I will be your wife. Under the circumstances, however, a public wedding and reception seem to me undesirable."

From this she went on to explain the situation as unreservedly as if he were already her husband; and when he had finished her letter he felt that there was no reply possible except that he would be in New York without delay.

New York was rather injured in its feelings when it learned that this marriage had taken place as quietly as if the participants were only common people in whom Society had not the greatest interest.

Several days before the ceremony, Douglass was shown his elegantly furnished apartments by David Bayley in person, and its connections with those of his future spouse were explained with the delight that no one but an originator feels.

"You can be as closely allied in matrimony as in a mechanic's domicile," laughed the Architect, "or

you can be as separate as is the state of royal personages. Throw these doors in the corridor open, and your apartments become one suite. Shut them and lock them, and these little tinkling bells will have to be touched to announce your wish to see each other. It all lies with you two. While the honeymoon is in progress I presume these locks will be superfluous. When it has ended, you will probably thank me a thousand times for my forethought."

Douglass put his hand thoughtfully on the shoulder of his companion.

"I shall be true to her, Dave," he said, impressively.

"To be sure," replied the other, with a pretense of being shocked at the insinuation. "But it might happen—once in a year or two—that you came home a little mellow, and did not care to have your wife see you until you had rested overnight. In that case it would be agreeable to have this separate entrance to your chamber, and be able to swear the next day that you slept so soundly that you heard nothing, in case she happened to ring. Those things will arrange themselves all right. You can be depended upon to use judgment. A man doesn't change all of his habits in an hour, but I'll risk you, as I have always said."

They walked through the little corridor, which Bayley jokingly called the "Bridge of Sighs," into Miss Scarlett's apartments, which had been prepared for her coming husband's inspection. Everything was as dainty as if meant for the residence of a fairy. There was a scent of some unknown perfume in the air that almost took Douglass's breath away.

"You told me once," he said, when he had looked

all he cared to, and was again on the other side of the "bridge," "of a valet—a Swiss—that you could recommend. Is he available now?"

Mr. Bayley laughed good-humoredly.

"I'm sorry to say he is at present in the employ of one of the younger Vanderschmidts," he replied. "He could be bribed away, I suppose; but will that be necessary? What is it you need? Some one to accompany you to the club and back, and give you a quiet tip if you are getting frisky? There are plenty of fellows who could do that for you."

"It's no laughing matter," said Douglass. "I have resolved to behave superlatively well after I am married. A fellow who would steer me for a few months would be of the greatest value. After a while I ought to be able to go it alone; but at first —well, you know what a fool I am, as well as I can tell you."

The Architect did not take the pains to dispute his friend. He thought him over-cautious, but he did not intend to tell him so. If he wanted a male escort there was no reason why he should not have one. He began to rack his memory. Wasn't there some one he could think of? And an idea came to him suddenly.

"I know of a young man," he said, in response to Maybury's inquiring looks. "You know him, too. He's got some of the best qualities for this sort of thing. I speak of—what the deuce is his name?—young Strange!"

Douglass turned away a moment, fearful lest he should betray the special interest that this name had for him.

"The carpenter?" he asked, inspecting a carving on a window.

"Well, he was one once," said Bayley. "He carved that very piece of wood you are looking at." Maybury straightened himself up and looked elsewhere, as he heard this announcement. "But for a long time, you know, he has been doing a sort of courier's duty for Miss Scarlett. We took him to New Orleans with us, and he proved an invaluable assistant. The Senator has raised his wages three times since he first engaged him."

Ah! It was explained now, the presence of Austin on St. Charles street, on that March evening! Douglass breathed a sigh of relief.

"When you are married, Miss Scarlett—I should say, your wife—won't need him any longer," continued Bayley, "and he's just the sort of man you want."

Was he, indeed! Douglass did not believe it, but he thought better to say nothing definite at the time. He remarked that he should not need any one at first, and that there was time enough to think of such things later.

There was not even to be a wedding tour, at present. Flora did not feel able to travel, and the heat of early September was too great to make a journey comfortable. The marriage service was read in the parlors of the Scarlett mansion, in the early evening, with no one present but the Senator, Charles, Mme. Saccard and Austin Strange. The latter was called in as a witness at the last moment, on a suggestion that one other person not a relation to the contracting parties was wanted. Austin was evidently unused to anything of this sort, for he was without

color and trembled visibly. It required the kind and reassuring smile of the bride—thoughtful of her inferiors even at this moment—to enable him to avoid attracting attention.

Flora stood the ordeal of the marriage very well indeed, but after the clergyman and the others had left the parlor, and she was alone with Douglass, she gave signs of a collapse. Evading the kiss which her husband would have given her, and yet in such a way that he could take no offense, she remarked that her head was dizzy and she wanted to be alone.

"Go to your room and let Margot take care of you," he whispered, tenderly. "By-and-by I will come."

"Not to-night—do not come to-night, Douglass," she replied, faintly. "I am—indeed—quite ill. To-morrow, Douglass—not to-night."

At her request he then rang for Margot and saw her disappear with the maid.

CHAPTER XXI.

"DO YOU THINK, MY DEAR?"

Probably it is seldom agreeable for a newly-wedded groom to be separated from his bride on the night following the ceremony which has, in the language of the law, made them one. In the case of Douglass Maybury, however, the disappearance of his wife in the manner just related was a positive relief. His

sentiments towards her were of a most peculiar order. In the first place he could not help feeling a little like a sneak thief who had crept in at a second-story window and was about to rob the house. He had married this girl simply because his other means of living had come to an end. Secondly, he was frightened at the transparent purity of her nature, so unlike anything with which he had before come into close relations. It was ridiculous, when he thought of it, that he had been the only one of that couple to blush since they had been together.

Flora was not well, her pale cheeks had showed that for months. For some reason she had sent for him, in spite of this, and herself fixed this early date for their nuptials. Douglass was very glad of his twenty-four hours' respite.

At breakfast she came to meet him, looking much as usual, except that the lack of sleep to which she confessed showed upon her swollen eyelids. An account of the marriage had appeared in the papers. The reporters had managed to eke out the slender story by a long history of the parents of the contracting parties. Maybury read several of these descriptions before leaving his room, and called his wife's attention to them in the breakfast salon. They smiled at them together, talking as quietly as if this was their fiftieth day of wedded life instead of the second.

Senator Scarlett, who had left them to breakfast alone, came to call on them in the course of the morning. He looked anxiously into the face of his daughter, hoping to read there a story which was not imprinted on that page. Everything went agreeably as usual during the day, which included a long car-

riage drive at the fashionable hour, on the most fashionable promenade. Hundreds of acquaintances bowed to the newly-wedded couple, who returned the salutations. It was remarked on every side that this was an ideal marriage. Beauty and wealth were hers; family prestige was his. They were the most envied that day of all the million and a half residents of New York.

Even the realistic novelist is not permitted to withdraw the curtains that hide some things from the gaze of the curious world. It can only be stated that for the week that succeeded Mr. and Mrs. Maybury lived the life they had contracted to live. And this was for a week only. On the eighth day Mrs. Maybury complained again of illness, and Dr. Parton was called in. It was the opinion of that wise practitioner that the new wife required a total absence of all excitement. Above all, she should have undisturbed repose. This he communicated as delicately as possible to the husband, salving the wound by saying that the trouble was only a temporary one, that would soon pass away.

Not knowing anything better to do, Douglass signalized the occasion by going to his club and getting very drunk that evening, being escorted to his rooms by Mr. Bayley in person at a very late—or rather early—hour.

It was the first test of his ability to keep his good resolutions, and Maybury was disgusted when he awoke in the middle of the day and found how little stamina he had shown. His first act was to send word inquiring how his wife had slept, and he told the messenger to add that he was himself suffering from a slight indisposition. When Bayley called, a

few hours later, the young man heard the full story of his conduct. He had persisted in drinking, it appeared, in spite of the advice of several of his closest friends, and had at one time become furiously enraged at a harmless steward who took the liberty to make a drink weaker than he thought it should be. So disgusted was Douglass at this recital that he began to fill up with alcoholic poison as soon as the Architect went his way, and it was a week before he left his rooms.

In the meantime Flora recovered enough to ride out, but not enough to see her husband except at table. Dr. Parton was very grave when interrogated, but would not say much. The Senator also had a solemn look. The whole affair wore on Maybury, until it seemed sometimes as if he would go frantic.

"You'll have me on your hands, too, if this goes on much longer," he said to Parton, at the end of a month.

Mr. Bayley viewed the changed aspect of things with an interested face. He told Douglass at last that if he were in his place he would take a little run out of town and pull himself together.

"You could go to the hills with your rod and gun," he said, "and no one would find any fault. I'd speak to your wife about it before the day is over. As long as she is under a physician's care she can't object."

At first Douglass protested with vigor that he would do nothing of the kind. When his wife was ill he wasn't going to be accused of running into the woods to enjoy himself. It would look hard-hearted, and if there was any fault he was guilty of it was not that one. But the suggestion kept ringing in

his ears, and three days from the time it was made he broached the idea to Flora at dinner.

"Do you think, my dear," he said, "that you could spare me for a few days? This is the time I go to the Adirondacks, and I need the change very much. If there was anything I could do for you, of course, I would not think of going for the world, but—"

To his gratification she warmly seconded his project. She added to it, however, that she thought there would be no better place for herself, as well as him, than in those same Adirondack hills. It was a wonder she had never thought of it. She could go to some hotel that kept open late, with two or three servants and Madame Saccard, and be quite comfortable. Then he could start from that point with his dogs and guides, and return there occasionally as the season advanced. It would be better than such a complete separation as it would make were she to remain in New York.

Nothing could have suited him better than this plan, which had all the advantages and none of the disagreeable features of his own. Dr. Parton was immediately sent for, and upon finding that Mrs. Maybury desired it very much, gave his consent.

"You can go with me and stay a day or two, can you not," said Flora to the physician, appealingly. "Then if I grow no worse you can come back."

This was agreed to by the doctor, and the cloud that had lowered over the house lifted a little. As soon as they could get ready the trip to the mountains was undertaken. Douglass was accompanied by a valet he had lately engaged, and who was known by the bucolic cognomen of Reuben; his

wife had Madame Saccard, Margot, another maid and—Austin Strange.

Mr. Maybury was glad his destination was out into the midst of the wilderness, instead of at the hotel with this young man. He had an indistinct dislike for him, dating from the original meeting. He also felt that it would not be pleasant should this surly fellow learn that his sister was being supported—though ever so innocently—by the husband of the woman who employed him.

Austin was as taciturn as ever and as unobtrusive, being always ready when wanted and not at all *en evidence* at other times. He was one of those admirable servants who only hear what is addressed directly to them, one in whose composition there was no curiosity, no interest in anything not intended for him to see. What he had to do, he did well. Mrs. Maybury told her husband on the train that she should never know how to get along again without him.

Mr. Scarlett, Sr., had gone to the West on business of importance. Another big strike was brewing, this time in some coal mines in which he had a very large investment. His last interview with his daughter before departing was affectionate in the extreme. Tears were on both their faces as they parted. There was nothing he could do for her, and Dr. Parton had assured him that her ill-health was liable to pass away before the winter was over. He guaranteed that she had no organic disease, nothing but what any woman might have and yet recover completely.

Charles Scarlett was also in the West. He arrived there before his father, and the strange spectacle

was presented of the heir of millions fraternizing with the dissatisfied workmen, assisting them financially, and giving them every moral encouragement in his power. It was a direct opposition to his father that he was engaged in this time, not a merely theoretical one. He could not help that. He felt that these men were right in resisting a power that strove to reduce them to the level of foreign miners, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

It was contended that they had been induced to leave the East and come to these mines in Van Buren under the expectation that a certain rate per ton would be paid them; and that, after a short time, they were informed that the payment would be reduced forty per cent. The agent who had picked them up in Pennsylvania and Ohio disputed their statements as to any bargain of special duration. He said he had only told them what the rate was at the time they were engaged. How could he help it if the state of the market had compelled the mining company to cut prices for the winter?

But the miners had come a thousand miles or more, with their families, spending most if not all of their means in railroad fares and in getting settled. They were in a state of rage at the trick they believed had been played on them. With the announcement of the cut-down they left the mines and proceeded to destroy all of the company's property they could lay their hands on.

In the midst of this work Charles Scarlett arrived. Under his influence the men were persuaded to cease their depredations temporarily. He declared that his father, who was daily expected, would grant the reasonable demands of the men. But the Sena-

tor had no idea of going alone to treat with that kind of people. When he came it was with the accompaniment of a regiment of soldiers, requisitioned without difficulty in his behalf. A conflict immediately took place and a number were killed on both sides.

Finding that the military had not even taken the pains to ascertain the real condition of things, but had fired upon the miners and their families much as if they were a pack of prairie wolves, Charles Scarlett lost his head completely. An order had been issued to clear out the entire village. He went into the house where he lodged and loaded a gun that he found there. Going to his doorway he stood defiantly waiting for a chance to assert the familiar maxim that a man's house is his castle. A detachment of soldiers, sweeping down the street, came upon the young man with that weapon in his hand ; and an officer demanded in no gentle voice that he surrender it and move on with the rest.

For answer Charles, instead of giving up the gun, cocked it. He would undoubtedly have discharged its contents in the face of the officer if a lieutenant behind had not drawn a pistol and put a ball into the shoulder of the opponent of the law's majesty. An hour later Senator Scarlett found his son in an improvised hospital, with a surgeon by his side, examining a bullet he had just drawn from his wound.

"Well, I guess you've got enough of it," smiled the father, though he still wore a look of anxiety. "If you haven't, the others have, for there's not one of them to be found within two miles of here."

The boy took the hand held out to him.

"They are *right*, though," he replied, faintly. "They won't work at that starving rate, and you'll find it out."

"They won't get a chance!" laughed the father. "The mine will be shut up till next spring now. I didn't care anything about their working, but when they began to smash things I had to interfere."

Charles put on a pleading look.

"You *could* give them the old wages, if you wished," he said. "It would make so little difference to you. They can't do any more than *exist* under the reduced schedule, and in a free land like ours a man has a right to *live!*"

The Senator shook his head positively.

"Business can't be done that way, my boy," he answered. "It never was and never will be based on anything but supply and demand. If coal miners can be had at a certain price no employer is going to pay a cent more. But it's just as well for you and me not to discuss the matter now. The doctor says you want rest for a day or two."

The next day, when the Senator called on his son, he found him doing well. He would be around in a fortnight, the physician told him.

"I've been rather busy this morning," said Mr. Scarlett, with his almost habitual smile. "In the first place I have about secured a promise that you will not be prosecuted, but will be permitted to go free as soon as your wound permits."

"Free!" echoed Charles, with astonishment. "Am I under arrest?"

"Certainly. You were brought here by the military, charged with inciting a riot."

The young man drew a long breath of surprise.

He had done all he could to stop the riot, until the poor miners were so brutally assaulted.

"I shall be able to get you free, I think," continued the Senator, "which will save you a couple of years or so in jail. And the other thing which I have been devoting myself to is a long letter to the War Department, recommending the promotion of the lieutenant who shot you."

Charles Scarlett wondered if his hearing had not played him false.

"I am much obliged," he replied, with a new vein of irony.

"You ought to be. Had he been a second later, according to all accounts, you would have been guilty of murder! And then it might have taken more influence even than *I* possess to get you released."

The wounded shoulder gave its possessor a severe twinge at that moment, doing more to cause the paleness which spread over his face than the announcement he had just heard.

"And the soldiers who shot down those men, women and children in the street like dogs?" he muttered. "Will there be any punishment for *them?*"

"Oh, no!" said the father. "That is very different. They were upholding the laws which the others were breaking."

Charles would not proceed with the argument. He recollected distinctly that the first shot was fired by the soldiers, at a time when the striking miners were with their families in the public street, doing nothing whatever to justify the outrage. The idolatrous love that he bore his father received a severe strain under this treatment of the people who had

been persuaded to the mines by the misrepresentation of his agent. But further discussion was useless. Mr. Scarlett had told him often that he claimed the same right to decide questions that he gave to his son and daughter.

When Charles was allowed to go from the hospital he remained with the strikers and did what he could for them during the long winter that followed. Almost every cent of his handsome income was expended in food, clothing and medicines for the suffering ones. And he saw at the end what the Senator assured him in advance he would see. He saw the hungry miners go to their work in the early spring at the reduced rates, just as soon as the mine was opened to them. They caught eagerly at the chance to labor, as the beaten dog snatches at a meatless bone flung into his jaws.

If curses and tears could affect the product of toil, the coal from the Van Buren mines for the next year would have been unsalable in the market. It would have refused to ignite in the furnaces and on the hearths to which it was taken, but would have filled the atmosphere with a dull and tainted smoke, repulsive to the sight and dangerous to the nostrils of men.

Not a happy smile illumined the faces in that settlement. The free American citizens, clothed with a manhood supposed to be superior to anything else on earth, were bowed under a slavery as great as that which ever befell the hapless sons of Ethiopia. A fiction of the Constitution told them they were born equal, but the stern logic of facts raised one above their heads whom fate had made their master and oppressor.

CHAPTER XXII.

SEEING AN OLD FRIEND.

Up in the Adirondack woods the fisher and trapper stayed till late in November. Mrs. Maybury, before that time, returned to her Fifth avenue home, parting from her husband with her usual sweetness but with no special demonstrations of affection. Partly from what she said to him, and a great deal from what Dr. Parton communicated, Mr. Maybury had resigned himself to a practical marital separation. If one's wife is not well he must be reasonable, no matter how fervidly he desires her. Of course, the doctor told him, over and over, Mrs. Maybury would not be so ill all her life. It needed only care and patience to restore her. She had been sick long before her marriage, and had not recovered as rapidly as had been hoped; that was all. Her trouble was largely nervous. If her husband wished to aid her convalescence he must see that nothing disturbed her mind. He could do her no greater service than this.

The shrewd Mr. Bayley seconded the advice of the physician.

"You always wanted a pile of money, and you hated marriage from your birth," he said. "I don't see but you are properly disposed of. You have the emoluments of your position without its cares, one of the most delightful situations conceivable. The world is open to you. Go South by-and-by, and let her go with you. Leave her with her retinue at

Jacksonville, for instance, and carry your gun and rod down to that Lake Worth paradise you discovered last year, or to Tampa. Take the good the gods provide, and thank your stars they stood in a golden quarter the hour you were born."

"But you don't take one thing into consideration," replied Maybury, gravely. "I love my wife. Yes, it is true. The more I see of her the dearer she grows. And I miss the confidences I hoped for, the closeness of mind that one expects in the marriage relation."

"Well, well," said the Architect, "that will be all right in time. If I am any judge of women she loves you quite as much as you do her. She hasn't the ways of most of them, that's all. And her illness —why do you keep forgetting that important matter? Upon my word, Douglass, you are the most unreasonable young man in the entire circle of my acquaintance."

Maybury began to think his friend was right. The idea of going back to Lake Worth fascinated him. He talked with his wife about it, and found her willing to accompany him as far as Savannah, at least, and perhaps farther as the season advanced. There was nothing to show that she had lost any of the regard which made her accept him as her husband. Her voice was as low and sweet as ever. Her blue eyes had the infantile expression he had noticed in them in that far away childhood when he had first made her acquaintance. But the paleness of her cheek had not departed, and sometimes, when he sent for her suddenly, she had a shortness of breath that he did not like to hear.

The journey was undertaken in good time. Leav-

ing Mrs. Maybury, Madame Saccard, Margot, Austin Strange and another servant at the De Soto Hotel in Savannah, the sportsman pushed rapidly to the extreme south of Florida. For the rest of November, December, and until the end of January he revelled in the fish and game that is to be found from Rockledge to Biscayne Bay. His wife's party, in the meantime, did the more civilized resorts of Florida, one after the other, sometimes accompanied by her father, who came and went from Washington and New York.

With February again, Douglass began to sigh for the pleasures of New Orleans. He went to Palatka, where his wife was at the Putnam House, and remained with her a day or two. She saw no reason why he should not go to the Crescent City, but in response to his invitation to join him, she said she believed the Hot Springs of Arkansas would benefit her and had about decided to go there for a month or two.

She urged him earnestly to go and enjoy himself to the utmost. She said it was no reason why he should not do so merely because she was suffering from a temporary disorder. She had Madame Saccard—and Austin. If anything happened they would telegraph.

The last words frightened him for a moment.

"If anything should happen!" he echoed. "You do not mean anything dangerous?"

He had taken a step nearer to her side, but she drew away, as if in fear that he was about to grasp her in his arms; which, indeed, he was almost on the point of doing.

"No, no; I am not going to die, or anything of

that kind," she said, with a light laugh. "I shall certainly be better in the spring. This cannot last much longer. If you wish to please me best have just as good a time in New Orleans as you can; just as good a time," she added, slowly, "as if you were not married."

A guilty flush rose to his cheeks as he thought of a meaning to this expression which she would be incapable of inventing. He turned away, fearful that she might read what was mirrored in his face. His mind shrank from such perfect purity as in the old tales the devil shrank from the presence of the Cross!

In New Orleans he renewed his acquaintance with the agreeable people he had met the previous year, and for a time forgot the troubles that had begun to harass him. He avoided, however, the society of men like Major Dilbach, and refused pointblank to visit the ball given by the "Well-Known Gentlemen." Neither did he, though ridiculed good-naturedly by many of his friends, show himself at any of the gay resorts in the Tenderloin district of that city. He became, in fact, so eminently respectable as to astonish himself. His amusements were sensible ones, and he actually went to bed sober most of the nights during the Carnival proceedings.

Letters exchanged with Flora, showing her to be happily situated at Hot Springs, determined him to continue his travels for at least a month or two. California was the point at which he began to aim. He could not very well go back to New York without exciting comment, and he had no fancy for a thermal resort.

When the Mardi Gras entertainments ended, how-

ever, a letter came to him that had much to do with making him change his mind.

"An old friend of yours, though a young one,"—so the latter ran,—"is in the city and wishes very much to see you. If you will call at No. — ——— street, and inquire for 'Miss Amsden,' the mystery will be explained."

An old friend? He examined the writing for some time, but there was nothing familiar about it. Who could have addressed him in this peculiar style. He knew no Miss Amsden, and the name must therefore be assumed. He had a good notion to pay no attention to it whatever; but curiosity prevailed, and an hour later he had rung the bell and was shown into the parlor of the house mentioned.

The delay was very slight between the sending up of his card and the appearance of Mr. Maybury's "old friend." But when the young lady walked into the parlor and closed the door carefully behind her, Douglass did not recollect ever seeing her before. She was rather tall, with a very interesting face and the appearance of possessing an unusually lovely form. Her dark hair, becomingly arranged with a sort of boy's parting on the left side, hung low on the neck and was tied with a blue bow. The dress that she wore was of the same color, a lighter shade than the ribbon, and her collar and cuffs were so wide as to give her something of the appearance of wearing the uniform of an order.

Her attitude, as she stood waiting to see if he would be the first to speak, was graceful in the extreme. A suggestion of a smile, which she seemed trying to suppress, played about her ripe lips and a

tint of warm blood showed through the healthy brown of her complexion.

"You don't know me?" she said, with a rising inflexion.

"Not at all," he replied, though even as he uttered the words the sound of her voice had a cadence that awakened a memory long past. "Will you kindly tell me where we have met before?"

Step by step, with the creeping motion of an animal that is used to caresses, the girl came toward him.

"Are you *sure* you do not know me?" she murmured, as though the words were only breathed, not spoken, through her pearly teeth. "Mr. Maybury—"

She was within two feet of him now, and he could scent the sweet breath that issued from her tempting mouth.

"I *do* think I have met you," he answered, half-dazed by her action, and not quite pleased with it, if the truth must be told. "I have met you, long ago, but I can't tell—" Then he looked at her closely, and cried, "Heavens! It's little Esther!"

Laughing for the first time, she put both her hands on his shoulders and told him he had guessed right.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed, disconcerted.

"W-e-l-l," she said, drawling her words, "I'll tell you. Only it's a very long story, and I don't exactly know how to begin it."

An anxious look, founded on something, he knew not what, came into his features. He motioned her to a chair and took another,

"In the first place," he asked, "is anything the matter? Are you, in any way, in trouble?"

She imitated his sober look for a moment, mockingly, and then burst into a laugh.

"N-o," she answered. "Not e-x-a-c-t-l-y."

"You appear in health," he said, abruptly. "Your father—is it anything about him?"

The red lips pouted with a sense of pique.

"My father?" the girl repeated. "Why, I know nothing of him whatever. It is years since we have met. I was sent to that school, you know, and things didn't seem to get along between him and me. The first time I went home I could see they regarded me as a different bird from the rest of the flock. I shall never have anything to do with that family again."

This was said with a slightly elevated tone, as if the girl considered herself a good long remove above those from whom she had sprung.

"All that," said Maybury, still eying her with a tinge of apprehension and disapproval, "does not explain why you are in New Orleans."

The tears flew to the eyes of the girl. She replied in a voice that was hardly audible. She had not supposed his first act would be to scold her. He could go at once if he had nothing kinder to say than that.

Quite shocked at the effect of his words, Maybury disclaimed any intention of causing her grief, and said she had completely misunderstood his purpose.

"I only have a natural desire," he continued, "to understand everything. If you do not wish to explain, of course, you need not do so."

"Oh, I *mean* to explain! It's just what I was going to do," said the young lady, trying to sup-

press the sobs that rose to her throat. "There was a fire—I thought you must have read of it in the newspapers."

Mr. Maybury was as much puzzled as ever.

"A fire?" he repeated, vaguely.

"Yes. At the school. It burned up everything. We only got out with our lives. The insurance companies made a lot of fuss, and the principal said he would not resume for the present. One of the teachers lived in Mobile—and asked me to go home with her. She said it was nice in the South—at this season. And so I came. And—I just happened to see in a *Picayune*—that you were here—and it's not far, and—"

Maybury drew himself up with what dignity he could summon.

"And you came here, alone!"

She opened her eyes at the expression she read in his.

"Do you think that is anything?" she asked. "It's only a little way. I'm not an infant. I have been on the railroad before. It doesn't take much experience to ride a hundred miles or so, and get into a carriage, and engage a room and board. If it comes to that, I presume you are here, *alone!*—yourself."

She had mocked the inflection he put upon the word "alone," and he began rather to like her independence. It was all right to be self-reliant, but he could not instantly realize that this tall girl was not the little Esther he had last seen four years previous.

"But, really," he said, "you have not told me half the things I want to know. What about your mysterious benefactor, and the lawyer that sees to your finances? Everything all right with them, I trust."

Rousing herself from a reverie into which she had fallen, Miss Strange told him with considerable detail the history of her dealings with her unknown friend. His allowances had been more than liberal. After providing for her wardrobe, all the expenses of the school and her vacation trips she had managed to lay by considerable for a very rainy day, should one ever come.

"I have always thought you knew who that man was," she added, as she finished her recital. "Now, don't you, honor bright?"

He smiled at her insinuating way.

"I have a suspicion," he admitted, "but it would be manifestly unfair for me to reveal what he evidently wishes to keep secret."

The girl's interest caused her face to glow with eagerness.

"Tell me just this," she said. "Is the one you think it is an old man or a young man?"

He hesitated before replying.

"Decidedly old, Miss Giddy."

She looked disappointed.

"Don't call me that!" she said.

"Old," repeated Maybury, "and ugly to a degree; I might almost say hideous. But that is of little account, if his money comes regularly."

Esther Strange wore a hurt look across the brows.

"I had hoped he was young and handsome," she said, in a constrained voice.

"What does old Blackstone Coke say?" he asked. "You must have tried to fish information out of him, before now."

Esther responded that Mr. Coke would tell her nothing, and she also told him that Mr. Chitty was

now the agent who sent her allowance. She admitted having written the latter gentleman several letters, in which she had inquired about various things, but his answers ignored her questions entirely.

"Does he say whether the remittances are likely to be permanent?" asked Maybury.

"No."

"And if they should cease, have you ever thought what you would do?"

The girl spread a lace handkerchief out in her lap, smoothing down the edges.

"Yes," she said.

It was a peculiar answer, and its tone indicated that it was the only reply she meant to make along that line.

"If you were coming to New Orleans," he suggested, taking a different tack, "you should have come a week earlier. The city has been full of people witnessing the festivities of Mardi Gras."

"I know it," replied Esther, "but I had no friends here to escort me about. And by the way you act, I do not think you would have liked to have me on *your* hands."

As long as the danger was ended, and his words could mean nothing but good nature, he answered that he should have liked it intensely. Then it occurred to him that she would have been an awkward incumbrance in many ways.

"W-e-l-l," said Esther, in that drawl she seemed fond of affecting. "I'll tell you what's the best thing you can do, now the Carnival is over. I want to see New Orleans, as long as I am here, and the places near it, and have some one go with me who knows everything and can explain them all. Before you

start for California you must give me two or three days, all to myself."

Maybury didn't know about that.

"I am full of engagements," he said, after what seemed to her a very long wait, "but I will gladly do anything I can for you. I mean to leave the city soon, and time is growing precious."

The girl's forehead grew darker.

"You needn't trouble yourself, if it is to come so grudgingly," she said, and there were symptoms of recurring tears. "I can hire a guide."

"Now, don't be pettish!" he exclaimed. "Besides, there are no guides to hire, though there ought to be plenty of them. I shall be glad to show you about, and we will begin to-morrow if you wish."

After a little further conversation that was agreed upon.

"Select your own hour," she said, as he went away. "I shall be here, mewed up close enough, so you will be certain to find me at home."

As Maybury walked along the street toward the Commercial Club he thought of the Esther Strange he had known five years before, the capricious, self-willed little child who had resolved in her infancy not to endure the privations of the life into which she had been born. He recalled all that happened at his first meeting with her, even the expression of her face and the haughty stamp of her little foot. It was a queer freak that had made him take on himself the rôle of her benefactor—when he had hardly enough of wealth for his own necessities. And here she was, a tall, handsome young woman, with the same determined mien. How old was she?—nineteen probably. And he was to be her chaperon

—how funny that sounded! Only for two or three days, though, and then she would return to her teacher at Mobile, and he would write to Mr. Littleton Chitty to see that she was put under the care of more exacting preceptors.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"IF YOU LEAVE IT TO ME."

Mrs. Maybury wrote occasionally to her husband, of course. The burden of her letters was that he must have as good a time as he could, and not think too much about her. She was no worse than formerly, perhaps a little better, but her "nerves" still demanded quiet. Dr. Parton, who was occasionally summoned from New York, confirmed her story. He also wrote to Douglass that if he wanted to do the best thing for everybody he would find some pleasant way to enjoy himself until his wife had made a little more progress.

The young husband read these epistles with mixed feelings. Flora seemed to be growing farther and farther away from him. He was in effect a bachelor again, albeit a very different one from what he was before his marriage. This wasn't entirely agreeable, either, this improvement in morals, for it left him wondering what to do with himself when evening came. A man should have either a wife or a mistress, he used to remark mentally.

Esther Strange came into his life at just the wrong time, in one sense, and just the right time in another. She helped to fill that terrible vacancy. She had a way that charmed him, though he did not get used to it in a moment. He walked and rode with her, and they passed evenings together at the theatre, and every day it grew harder to contemplate the approaching time when he must set his face in the direction of the Golden Gate, and see her pack up for the North.

"How much longer do you expect to remain in the city?" he asked her, one day, as they stood in front of the monument where the body of President Davis of the Confederacy was then awaiting transfer to Richmond.

It was in one of the prettiest cemeteries of the South, and this was the second time they had visited it together.

"How long do you *wish* me to stay?" she replied, demurely.

"If you leave it to me—" he began, and did not finish the sentence.

"That's exactly what I intend to do," said the girl, not meaning to let him off in that manner. "I have written to Mr. Chitty that you have taken entire charge of me."

The young man uttered a brief and forcible exclamation.

"You have done nothing of the kind!"

"W-e-l-l, t-h-e-n, I'm *going* to," she told him. "Because, you see, I have concluded to go to California the same as you, and some one must keep me from getting lost on the road."

They were talking in such low voices that a party

of sightseers from Indiana, who were close to them, could not distinguish a word. Walking down the slope they took seats in their carriage.

"You've not got money enough to go to California," said Maybury.

"Does it cost so awfully much?" she exclaimed. "I've got a good deal."

They were being driven out in the direction of Ponchartrain, and Maybury had drawn the curtains of the carriage, to keep out the sun and other over-inquisitive eyes.

"I have concluded," said the young man, after deliberation, "that I shall go to Mexico, instead of California. Now, it is evident that you ought not to travel around the Pacific coast alone, and it follows that you will proceed North as soon as I leave here."

Both wore entirely sober faces, though neither failed to realize the vein of comedy that ran through what they were saying. A pair of young people will get into this mood sometimes before they are aware of it.

"I had not cared to mention it," answered Esther, in the same collected tone, "but I also intend to go to Mexico, myself."

Maybury felt a wave of passion sweeping over him—one of those powerful avalanches which he had no moral strength to combat. It is the misfortune of those who have yielded often to temptation that they have no resolution left when the time of trial comes.

"And would you—really and truly—go to Mexico, *with me?*" he asked, leaning toward the young girl.

"Why not?" she replied, laconically.

Why not, indeed! Did she not know why not,

this woman of nineteen? If she did not know, was it his business to tell her?

"Your guardian might not like it," he suggested.

"What! Mr. Littleton Chitty? What has he to do with me, except to forward my allowance? Perhaps you mean the Mysterious One for whom he acts. If that gentleman has chosen to hide himself all of this time, never coming to see me, or writing me a line, is it probable he will care whether I am in the Land of the Aztecs or following the path of Fremont? As for other considerations—the opinion of Society and that sort of thing—I care very little for them. I am an advanced young woman, with ideas of my own."

She said these things airily, as if she meant them, and yet in a voice that left him somewhat in doubt where the humor ceased and the seriousness began. However, the main question was whether she would go with him, and after a little further conversation he satisfied himself on that point. She would go; she was willing to go; it might almost be said she was determined to go. This settled the whole matter.

And Mexico—that country mentioned at first in jest—was the place of places! In California he would be certain to run across acquaintances at every corner. Eastern tourists flocking there for their healths, former friends who had gone in search of fortune and missed it, and all sorts of people whom he would wish to avoid. But Mexico—who ever heard of any one going to Mexico? It was a tropical land. It had the charm of Montezuman romance. It would be as interesting as Spain, as wild as the Barbary states, as secluded as the Hud-

son's Bay Territory. Mexico, by all means, and the sooner the journey was undertaken the better!

"When shall we leave New Orleans?" he asked, feeling as if in a dream.

"I can be ready at an hour's notice."

She was evidently a very peculiar young woman. Whatever he had to say to her could be better communicated some days later, when they were sequestered from the civilization to which they were accustomed, and some hundreds of miles nearer the Tropic of Cancer.

"Suppose we call it to-morrow?" he suggested. "There is a train at eight or nine o'clock for Texas. Can you get up early enough to take that?"

She laughed at the question,

"If you will join me," she said, "I would like to get up much earlier. I have not seen the Market yet, remember, and if we go so soon that will be our only chance."

Maybury immediately assented to her plan, and said he would call at her house at five o'clock on the following morning. Then they would go to the French Market, see the sights, eat breakfast in a restaurant, and get taken to their station.

"A very good scheme, with a little alteration," smiled Esther. "You must not forget that I have a reputation to sustain."

He asked meekly in what way he had suggested injuring that precious article.

"The landlady where I live would be outraged," she replied, "to have my baggage taken from the house at such an unseemly hour. If a woman is to to do anything *outré*, the first thing she needs to cultivate is a genteel capacity for lying. I shall have to

give up my quarters this evening, about the time a train is to go to Mobile. The cabman will start with me for the station—but he will not take me there. Do you understand?"

A wild notion that she proposed to present herself at his lodgings sprang into Maybury's head and then vanished. He had not the slightest idea what she intended to do.

"For a man of the world, you seem exceedingly obtuse," said the girl, after taking a survey of his blank countenance. "Instead of going to the Louisville and Nashville Depot I shall ask my jehu to take me to the St. Charles. One can go in and out of a big hotel at any hour. In the morning I will be in the ladies' room when you call for me. We will see the Market, get our breakfasts separately, and at the proper hour I will board the train for Texas."

It was a shrewd idea, certainly. In case any link in the chain should be uncovered it was surely better if he was seen leaving for "California," on the natural train, and apparently alone. To go to Mexico he could continue on the Southern Pacific to San Antonio.

"I am afraid I shall have to send a messenger to call you in the morning," he said, brightly, as he neared her lodgings on the homeward way.

"More likely I shall have to wait for you," she answered. "I shall be in the Ladies' Parlor of the St. Charles at five o'clock sharp."

"Then you will see me there soon after," he said. "Now, is there anything I can do?"

"Yes. You can order my place in the Pullman."

"And get your tickets with my own?"

She hesitated.

"If you like. I can pay you after we get under way."

"I shall write to Mr. Chitty," she added, "to forward money, from time to time. Where is it best to have it sent?"

"To the City of Mexico," he answered. "Get it in drafts that I can easily cash anywhere."

In the Ladies' Parlor of the St. Charles he found Miss Esther, the next morning, as calm and collected as if she was not embarking upon the most peculiar journey of her life.

"I am on time, you see, in spite of your prediction," she said, rising to greet him.

"And I, notwithstanding your doubt," he answered. "Did you rest well last night?"

"Excellently."

"Shall we go now to the Creole Market?"

"Whenever you are ready."

There were very few people about, only one in fact that they noticed beside the employes of the hotel, as they descended the stone steps from the balcony and turned their faces toward Canal street. The atmosphere was as balmy as can be imagined and the day promised to be one of those so common there at this season, cloudy but devoid of rain. They entered the French Quarter, walking slowly along the streets amid the odd architecture of a bygone day, until they emerged into the public square with the mate to the Washington statue of Gen. Jackson. At the Market they interestedly watched the dealers and patrons, for Esther had never witnessed a similar sight. To Maybury, who had been in those of a dozen foreign cities, this one seemed the most worth

visiting of them all, excepting the African and Asiatic bazaars.

Miss Strange was quite delighted. The Creole women, with their baskets, selecting the day's provisions, pricing and examining each article with the care their Northern sisters use only on goods for personal wear or furnishings for the dwelling; the negroes of all shades, from the plantation worker to the dainty octoroon clad in her newest finery; the interminable stalls, with everything edible from fish to fruit; the peculiar dialects and unknown tongues that made a pleasant babel all around her; the hungry breakfasters, sitting at little shelves and munching various compounds that did not look half as savory as they seemed; this and much more held the young girl's attention and made her loath to leave the place when her escort suggested that the time had come for doing so.

"If I were to live in New Orleans a month I should come to this market every morning," she said. "I never should tire of watching those people. How odd it seems to hear negroes speaking that French patois! Instead of being in America one could easily conceive himself thousands of miles away."

Then he told her something of the foreign markets he had visited; of the stupendously large ones in London; of the Halles at Paris and the flower market of the Madeline; of the Dutch markets, the fairs of Russia, the booths in the central square of Toulouse, the Sok at Tangier, the fish sales under the Algerian arcade. And she replied, in the most matter-of-fact way, that some day she would go to all of them with him, never raising her eyes as she spoke

or indicating that there was a double meaning to her expressions.

He walked on with her, not directly to the hotel, but toward the water front. It was still early to return. When they reached the levee they saw many steamboats moored along the shore. Some were laden with cotton, some with wheat and others bound up-stream with merchandise.

New Orleans is a great port and a growing one. The Father of Waters is pouring its treasures into her lap in greater volume year by year. A new line of steamboats, running direct to Liverpool, is soon to be added to her fleet, making her no inconsiderable rival to the northerly seaports in the Atlantic carrying trade. There is every probability that she will be among the six largest cities in the Union before ten more years have elapsed.

Early as was the hour, there was a bustle in progress that betokened an active day. Gangs of men, most of them dark in hue, were engaged in loading or unloading the various craft, while scores of drays drawn by mules were taking cargoes to and from the vessels.

Consulting his watch, Maybury found that it was, at last, time to go.

"The train departs at nine," he said, as he handed her into a vehicle, which was found a short distance away. "That is, the ferry leaves this side of the river at that hour. You must start from the St. Charles at 8.15 in order to be certain not to miss."

"And it is now seven," said Esther. "Everything is ready. I have only to take a light breakfast."

The coachman was waiting, with a coachman's

evident impatience, to set off on his journey, but Maybury delayed him a moment longer.

"You don't think, do you," he asked, "that—that any one is watching us?"

"Who?"

"Does any one know you are in New Orleans? Any one, but—"

"Only my teacher, who is at Mobile; and Mr. Chitty, if he has got my letter, which has hardly had time to reach him. Who would have any business to know, or to care? I am responsible to no one now—unless it be to the unknown guardian whom I have never seen."

"And to me," he suggested, smiling. For he was very glad to hear her speak so confidently.

"To you?" she echoed smiling. "Not at all. Don't flatter yourself."

The sensation of being pursued had haunted Maybury all the morning. Stopping for the twentieth time to look behind him, he detected a familiar face dodging into an alleyway, and obeying his impulse he ran to the spot and caught the owner by the shoulder.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded, roughly, for he was by this time somewhat excited.

It was the negro, Jefferson, whom he had paid off the previous evening, having no further use for his services. Jeff was of inky hue, but he came near turning white with alarm at the manner of his questioner.

"I don't want nuffin," he stammered.

"You have been following me!" said Maybury, severely.

"Only a block, sah. I was jest gwine up de street, sah."

It was useless to waste a display of contempt on this creature. He wore such a meek appearance that nobody could have suspected him of anything more than indiscretion.

"Going up the street, eh?" said Maybury, eying him sharply. "You're going in a pretty direct line to the Parish prison!"

The negro protested with rolling eyeballs that he was only looking for a chance to earn an honest living. He swore he had not followed Maybury intentionally.

The young man reflected a minute. Perhaps he had made a mistake.

"You know Mr. Middleford, in the hotel at Lake Ponchartrain," he said, presently. "I will give you two dollars to carry him a note."

Taking a card from his pocket he wrote a few words on it. The bill that he gave the negro with this missive was not for two dollars, but for ten. The quick eye of the fellow discovered what he thought was an error, and he crumpled the money in his fist lest it should attract attention.

"All right, sah," he said, receiving the envelope. "And dere's ten cents mo', sah, for car-fare."

Admiring the "cheek" of the darky, Maybury added a quarter to what he had already given him.

"Two tickets to San Antonio," he told the station agent, an hour later. "Do you sell the Pullman tickets here also?"

"You will have no trouble getting them on the train," was the reply.

Again there was that sensation of being watched!

Looking in every direction, Maybury could not see any person that appeared to take the least interest in him, but he would have been willing to wager a goodly sum that his destination was now known to some one who had taken extraordinary pains to learn it. He had asked for two tickets, also. and probably the shadower knew that.

Well, what harm was there in it? So far he had done nothing of which any one could very deeply complain. It would only make him more guarded in his conduct until he was much further from pursuit. Perhaps it was the very best thing that could happen to him.

He found Esther and got the baggage checked which she pointed out to him, as well as his own. Then he entered the Pullman with her, and when the train started he drew a faint sigh of relief. Almost before it was ended, however, he looked upon a disagreeable sight from the car window.

That negro was grinning at him from the platform which was being left behind, and waving a farewell with the letter he had paid him to deliver at that hour, at a point four miles away!

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE MEXICAN MONTEREY.

That there was something peculiar in this conduct of T. Jefferson, it was useless for Mr. Maybury to deny; but he turned from the sight of the negro to that of the pretty girl by his side, who had voluntarily

started on a long journey as his companion—with him, as she put it herself, to act as her "chaperon." Whatever object the black man had in following him about the streets of New Orleans, whatever prevented him from going to deliver that letter as he had been ordered, he was now far behind, and the train was bearing the travelers farther from him each moment. There was every probability that he knew their destination, that he had overheard the direction given to the station agent for the two tickets; it was more than likely that he would convey this information to whoever was employing him. Never mind. Nobody except Miss Strange and Mr. Maybury knew that their route was not to be toward California, but toward Mexico. He would throw his pursuers, if any there were, off the scent at San Antonio. And after that, to follow them would be like chasing wild birds on the wing!

Their conversation which presently began referred mainly to the country through which they were passing, that low-lying land that borders the railway for miles after leaving the Crescent City for the west. When they came to higher country they talked of the topography of that section, and upon entering Texas the gigantic area of that southwestern empire served as a topic. Meal-time varied the monotony, and so did two "Albatross" novels that were purchased of the train-boy. Esther read "Why I'm Single" and Mr. Maybury conned "Thy Neighbor's Wife" a second time. As he was bound to a Spanish-speaking country he wanted to go over again Rad Redfield's tour in Spain.

Toward evening he left Esther and passed an hour or two in the smoking compartment, where he met

some gentlemen from Wisconsin, with whom he enjoyed a smoke and a general conversation. When it was bed-time he said good-night to Esther early, admitting that he was in want of rest.

The next day, when they arrived at San Antonio, they were driven immediately to the hotel, where Maybury selected rooms as far apart from each other as possible, and registered the first names which came into his mind, to throw any unduly observant watchers off the scent. He engaged a carriage as soon as lunch was over, and was taken to the principal places of interest with his companion. The Alamo, the Soldier's Barracks, the Mexican Quarter, the old ruins of churches and monasteries in the suburbs interested them both very much, but the most enjoyable thing, after all, was the handsome city itself. There was a substantial appearance of thrift about the place. The business blocks would have done credit to any of the older cities. The residences were set, for the most part, in tasty grounds, having the real homelike air that is so often wanting.

The salubriousness of the atmosphere made it evident that San Antonio had not unjustly earned its fame as a health resort. Maybury was especially struck by the beauty of the little river that meandered through the town, crossed by streets and bridges at frequent intervals. He told Esther that it reminded him in some ways of the Adige at Verona. If the people would only possess themselves, as a municipality, of both its banks, and lay them out in drives and walks they would have, he said, the finest parkway available to any inland city.

After consulting with the local agents of both, or

rather all, of the railways that led to the Aztecan land, he decided to enter Mexico by the way of Laredo. On the following morning he took the train for that point, with his companion. Most of the day they sped through a country in which the mezquite flourishes and great herds of cattle graze. They found that the first place of special interest beyond the border was the city of Monterey. As this point is reached at about three in the morning one sleeping-car is detached here and the passengers are permitted to slumber unmolested on a side-track until seven o'clock.

Night fell shortly after leaving Laredo, and another early hour for retiring was chosen by both our travelers. Before they parted for the night Maybury talked a long time with Esther, endeavoring to discover if she had the least regret at the extraordinary step she had taken; but there was nothing visible.

In Monterey they found a quiet house on one of the principal plazas and were soon made comfortable. It was—like many other houses in this part of the world—of two stories, though a goodly proportion of them have only one. There was something indescribably exhilarating in the air of the city, and both of the travelers partook of a hearty breakfast in the brick-floored dining-room. Maybury furbished up his stock of Spanish, though one of the waiters spoke a certain grade of English, and Esther laughed to hear the unfamiliar syllables. Shortly after they had eaten they took a stroll about the place and on returning to the hotel declared the morning to have been most pleasantly spent.

The valley in which Monterey is situated is very

beautiful. A river, shallow at most seasons as is the Tagus, creeps down from the mountains and meanders leisurely through the town. The houses are built mainly of adobe, the best of them wearing handsome coatings of plaster, painted brightly, often in imitation of marble and other stones. It is said that there is not a chimney in the place, and this, if not literally true, is nearly so. The cooking is done with charcoal, which does not necessitate a flue. Certainly there is no fire department, and no need of any. It is difficult to conceive how a fire, should one start, could pass the thick walls of the building in which it originated. The roofs are flat, covered with cane stalks or similar material, coated with mud. A house thus built ought to last forever, and it is said that a very comfortable cottage, without ornament, can be erected at the cost of $150.

"However," said a young lady at the hotel, who told these things to Esther and her escort, "it would be no great hardship were one compelled to sleep out of doors, except during the rainy season. The evenings have about the same temperature in summer and winter, there being no great variations as in the United States."

For several hours in the vicinity of noon the sun is apt to shine with a heat not comfortable to Northerners, or indeed to the residents themselves. After lunch it is the custom of nearly every one to seek a cool and secluded place indoors and indulge in a genuine Spanish siesta. At half-past three or four the air is again sufficiently cool to make a walk in the open air a thing of pleasure. In the evening the plazas are filled with a concourse of happy-faced people, walking in an interminable circle, chatting

in a subdued key with each other and bowing graciously to friends whom they meet. Most of the women are bareheaded, if such a term can be used where such magnificent black hair, sometimes adorned with roses, is seen. The men wear conical hats of immense size, many of which cost a good deal of money, some as high as a thousand dollars.

"They look like pictures of bull-fighters," said Esther, as she sat with Maybury watching the pageant.

"All but the hats," he replied. "But glance at the ladies. Are they handsome, do you think?"

The girl began to study those of her sex who were passing.

"I have been looking at the men," she said.

"Do you always look at the men?" he asked, mischievously.

She turned to him and their eyes met. She had to laugh.

"The women are not handsome, as a general rule," she said, presently. "A few of them are rather pretty. Some of the poorest dressed are the most interesting, I think. But the men—they look very well indeed."

A band, belonging to the military, stationed in the centre of the Plaza by the fountain, began to play a beautiful tune. It was a most poetic moment.

"Do you know how it seems to me?" he asked her. "It seems as if we were at a theatre, and that all this was a mere spectacle invented for our delight."

She nodded. It was a little like that to her, too. The moon was rising and could be seen in the distant tree-tops. The strains of music grew wonder-

fully lovely. The people continued their procession, the upper-classes on the outer ring and the peons nearer the centre. The waters of the fountain dripped incessantly.

The breezes, wafted from the mountain sides, fanned their faces. There was a dreaminess, a drowsiness in the atmosphere that made it like an enchanted land. They sat so long that the crowd thinned out gradually and they were left nearly alone.

"It must be late," said Esther, looking at her watch. "Why, it is nearly eleven!"

"It is quite the same," he said, as he saw she intended to rise. "If we retire late, we can rise later in the morning, and time is of no account. Let us stay here a little longer and enjoy the perfection of this night air."

She hesitated, and he urged his case.

"Esther," he said, "listen a minute to me. There is no one near who can understand a word I say—those fellows speak only their native tongue—"

"I think I must go in."

She rose to her feet.

Piqued that she should be so easily the victor in the first round of their contest, he rose with her and, putting on the best face he could, walked slowly to the hotel and to her door.

When she had disappeared into her room, he half wished he were back in New York, where he could run in at the club and talk with some of his old friends. Monterey was at that moment the dullest place in all Christendom.

"What am I to think of her?" he mused, going slowly back to the Plaza.

But, after all, he reflected, how could he ex-

pect her to act much differently? It was one of the fancies of women to tantalize. It would not do to take this seriously. When they were through with Monterey they would go still farther into the interior, and, as they grew more and more to know each other, time would set things right.

Esther Strange could see every movement he made from the half-closed lattice of her window, which overlooked the Plaza. She sank in a heap on the floor and watched him intently.

"I could love that man very much, if I only dared!" she whispered to herself. "I could love him very, very much!"

The night was still beautiful. She could hear the trickling of the water in the fountain in the centre of the Plaza. A night bird, perched in one of the trees in the park, began to sing. The moon was just beyond the municipal building, to the left, but its rays fell on Maybury and illumined his face so that she could see every lineament plainly.

"How I could love him!" she repeated, as she rose and began to disrobe. "Yes, if I—only—dared!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"SHALL I PUT OUT THE LIGHT?"

Thus far, in spite of the suspicious appearance of his conduct, Douglass Maybury had no really definite intentions in reference to the fair girl who had undertaken with him this most peculiar journey.

He had suffered a good many sad hours on account of the barrier which Mrs. Maybury's illness had raised between them, but he had never once in his thoughts blamed Flora. And never since their wedding-day had he dreamed of violating his vows. All his fears that he might be tempted to be untrue to her had proved baseless. She was his wife. He believed nothing could make him forget that, even if she should remain an invalid as long as she lived. What, then, was he doing with Esther Strange, in a foreign land, traveling under circumstances which must appear culpable to any one of his acquaintances, should it ever be discovered!

All his youth he had been used to feminine companionship. He craved it as a thirsty man craves water. With Esther he was simply drifting. Her company was most attractive to him, under the circumstances. He had no reason to doubt that her character was good. He believed that he had strength enough for both if there came a dangerous moment. But up to the present time there was nothing to indicate that the girl was likely to commit the least indiscretion. They had been in each other's almost exclusive society for a week and she was not yet even playing the part of a "sister."

Prepared to repel anything like advances, the young man was disappointed by this excessive coldness. He wanted her to behave without grossness, but he also wanted a closer companionship than she gave signs of intending to allow. She was as distant to him as his own wife had been. The moment he relaxed the least particle she took fright. Could she be afraid of him, after taking this journey into an unknown land under his escort? He wished heartily

that there was some way in which he could learn the exact state of her mind.

The next morning Esther met him with her sweetest smile. He thought it odd how much sweeter her smiles were at daybreak than nightfall. The day was passed agreeably. They took a ride to the hot baths of Topo Chico, where both of them tested the virtues of the waters, and in the early evening they had a canter on horseback. A very handsome pair they made as they returned to their headquarters at about seven o'clock. The group that gathered about the hotel entrance were unanimous in agreeing that the lady rode extremely well.

Two days later there was a ball given by the American residents, and Mr. Maybury and Miss Strange were invited to it. The number of Americans in Monterey is limited, but the characters in our story found them very bright and interesting people. Esther had been registered under a fictitious name—that of Miss Savage—as she did not wish her movements traced. Maybury alluded to her as his cousin, and if any doubt arose as to this relationship there was nothing in the conduct of either to justify suspicion. At the end of the first waltz he resigned her to a young Spanish-American who had been presented to them, and who spoke a fair quality of English.

"Your cousin is very young," said a fair creature, as Douglass escorted her to a seat after one of the dances.

"Very," he replied. "A school-girl. But she enjoys your country exceedingly."

"Is she an orphan?"

"Poor child, yes!" said Maybury, unblushingly.

"And I have the fortune to be in a sense her guardian."

The young lady looked at her companion searchingly. She wondered if there was anything like a love affair in this peculiar journey. There was no way in which she could ascertain, however, and she contented herself with the information she had gained, which she imparted freely to her friends.

"You are an orphan, and my cousin, remember, in case you are asked," said Maybury, warningly, the next time he took Miss Strange upon the ball-room floor. "I had these interesting facts drawn out of me by the young woman I have just escorted to her seat."

Esther laughed.

"Is that the best a man can do?" she asked. "Why didn't you give her an evasive answer? I have given a dozen to Señor Grijalva. I have kept saying 'Indeed?' 'Is it possible?' 'Perhaps you are right,' and things of that kind to him for the last fifteen minutes. And when none of those would do I have affected not to hear, or have interrupted by calling his attention to something in the room. However, it is a good thing to know one's status, and I am glad to be informed that I am an orphan. Now you might as well tell me the rest. Am I poor as a mouse in a meeting-house, or a great heiress? Are you my cousin on my father's or my mother's side? How long are we going to stay in Mexico? Are you married or single? I have been asked all those things and plenty more since I came here this evening."

Maybury had to smile with her at the oddity of the situation. Clearly they ought to have rehearsed

these things before coming. The girl's shrewdness had saved them for this time, however.

"Keep up your taciturnity for the rest of the evening," he said, "and to-morrow we will open a school of mutual instruction. Are you having a good time?" he added.

She said she was having a delightful time and showed him her card, full for every number. He had a vivid wish that the ball was over and that he could take her in a carriage for a ride the rest of the night, away out into the country, where he could talk to her alone. But when he looked again into her fair face and saw the bright light in her clear eyes, he was glad to have her with him at any price. He fancied there was something new in her expression—something more earnest than before, but if she had anything to say to him this was neither the time nor place. And after all it might have been merely imagination, born of the intensity of his hope.

When the ball was over he escorted the girl to the hotel and left her at her door without a word or a look that could be given a double meaning. He had made up his mind that Monterey was not secluded enough for the close companionship he craved. There were too many Americans there, and the town was too near the Texan border. He must go farther away.

The next day he learned of a natural wonder in the town of Garcia, near Santa Catarina, in the shape of a mammoth cave, containing stalactites and stalagmites rivalling those of Kentucky. Nothing could be better as a beginning. Esther, when told of the project, entered into it with enthusiasm. She would talk of nothing else each evening, as they

rode toward the gigantic La Silla, the stupendous saddle that surmounts the Sierras Madre, or to that other hill over which the Bishop's Mitre hangs so plainly in the sky, visible for miles around.

A looked-for missive came at last, telling Maybury that everything was all right, and inclosing a new letter of credit. Mr. Chitty expressed his belief that Miss Strange's family were entirely unaware of her presence in Mexico, and that her late teachers gave themselves no concern on her account. More than this the worthy lawyer did not feel called upon to say, and Douglass smiled grimly as he folded up the note and put it, with its accompaniments, in his pocket.

Several of the young ladies at the hotel, who had become much attached to Esther, tried to frighten her from her proposed trip. She would meet no one but Mexicans, they said; the accommodations would be terrible, as there was no decent hostelrie in Garcia; it was a long and heating ride to the cave, and a climb to exhaust one when the foot of the mountain was reached; in order to do it well, it would be necessary to spend at least two nights away. Esther laughed at all of these bugbears, saying she was fond of adventure, and was not in the least afraid of fatigue. Long rides and hard climbs were among the things she liked best. She would trust herself anywhere her cousin was willing to go. When the day came, however, hers was the only smiling female face on that side of the Plaza. Her advisers persisted to the last that the only proper way to see the cave was in a large party, with provisions and guides galore.

Mr. Maybury had a letter of introduction to a small

merchant at Garcia, who was asked to assist in securing food and shelter and in engaging guides and horses. He cared very little, to tell the truth, about the cave. If he had left the country without seeing it he would have been just as contented. But by his side in the train that crept toward Santa Catarina was the young daughter of the carpenter. She was going on this quest with him. It was quite enough. There was nothing interesting in the railway ride—nothing in the carriage journey from the station to the village of Garcia—but *her*.

He found the merchant in his diminutive store, a Spaniard to the province born, who looked like one of the figures in the "Doctor of Alcantara," and who was very obliging. The merchant read the letter, inquired after the health of the writer, a silver miner who had formerly resided in that place, and begged his visitors to wait a few minutes until he could send for a man who entertained travelers and furnished guides. In considerably longer time than would be accounted a brief one by residents of the United States, the sought-for person was found. And after such explanations as the merchant could give him, the new-comer bade his guests follow him to his house at the other end of the village, which they did in the carriage that had brought them from the station, and which, it turned out, was also his property.

It was now evening. The landlord, if such he should be called, told Maybury that dinner would be ready in a short time, and upon request conducted the travelers to a room where a very primitive toilet could be made. As his footsteps were retreating Esther turned to her companion and said she would require a short time for preparation and

that when she was ready she would meet him in the general room. Thus dismissed, Maybury went back to his host, and secured a basin of water and a towel, which he placed on a chair in the yard and made his ablutions, much to the surprise of the landlord.

"They have probably been quarreling," said the Mexican to his wife, in explanation.

The dinner was not appetizing to the travelers. The meat was of goat's flesh, done very rare, and neither of them would touch it. The bread was fair and there was plenty of milk and a dish of eggs, but not much else. However, Maybury ate in silence, knowing that he could do nothing to make it better, and thinking it unadvisable to utter criticisms that might be understood even if the exact language was not comprehended. When the travelers rose from the table they took a short stroll out toward the Rio San Juan, delighted with the balmy air and gorgeous sunset.

The houses of the village were mostly of unadorned adobe. An air of the deepest poverty hung over all, but it was a poverty that carries with it far less of sting than that which strikes the cold and hungry poor of more highly civilized lands. It is doubtful if there was an unfed stomach in that cluster of hovels, and there is little of winter weather to penetrate unpleasantly those walls of earth. Thinking to make himself agreeable, Maybury threw a handful of coppers to a group of small children that came out to see the strangers, but instead of picking up the coins the urchins fled precipitately.

Esther was unusually pensive that evening. She had begun to feel the isolation of her position, and

to wish that she had considered a little longer before coming to this out of the way place. The paucity of her dinner had begun to do its work. She had become used to good fare and she shuddered as she thought of the half-cooked goat's meat that had been set before her. Besides this, there were five or six Mexicans in the house, whose looks were not, to her unaccustomed eyes, reassuring. She thought that in the event of trouble it would add to the terrors of the situation not to be able to understand a word they spoke, or speak one that had any meaning for them. In the midst of all there was only one bright figure—Mr. Maybury.

"I wish you would go with me for a minute to see where I am to sleep," she stammered, when they had reached the house again. "I want to be sure the bolts are sufficient, that all the windows and doors are secure."

"Willingly," he answered. And stopping the landlord, who happened to enter at that moment, he told him in as good Spanish as he could muster, that he would like to see madame's room at once.

Bowing gruffly, as one who resents an imputation that anything in his house can possibly be less elegant than it ought to be, the landlord brought a lamp from the next room and led the travelers to a chamber. Setting the luminary on the table he waited to learn if there was anything else required.

"Why, this is on the ground floor!" exclaimed Esther, in a low tone, as Douglass went to examine the shutters to the windows.

"Naturally," he replied, "when there is but one story to the building."

The girl turned a shade paler, and set her teeth together to keep from uttering a scream.

Maybury threw open the window-shutters, and disclosed the fact that there were no fastenings to them whatever.

"How do you secure these?" he asked the landlord, who stood like a statue, in the inner doorway.

"We do not secure them," was the surprising reply.

"But supposing some one should enter?"

"They would hardly take the trouble to come in at the windows when the door is more convenient."

The young man walked to the outer door and discovered, somewhat to his consternation, that it was as unprovided with fastenings as the shutters.

He did not know what to do. Certainly of all things he must not anger his host, whose temper, he could already see, was mercurial. How was he to satisfy Esther, or even himself! The girl had come forward, and in her excitement had caught him by the sleeve. It did not require a knowledge of any foreign tongue for her to see that she was expected to pass the night in a room without the least protection against whoever chose to enter.

"If a guest should lose his purse or his watch—what then?" asked Maybury, in a polite tone, as if it was a small matter that had happened to occur to him.

The brow of the landlord darkened. He answered in a louder voice that he was responsible for the property of his guests, and that no one had ever lost anything under his roof. Saying which, he turned on his heel as if tired of talking with such a foolish

person, and closed the door that led into the main part of the house behind him.

"What shall we do?" asked Esther, appealingly. "Do you think they mean us any harm?"

"Not the least," replied Douglass, though he was not by any means as certain of it as he would have liked to be. "Calm yourself and let us talk it over sensibly."

The girl, with an effort, tried to follow his advice and both of them seated themselves.

"This landlord," said Maybury, "took charge of us on request of Señor Hernandez, an old and reputable resident here. Señor Hernandez had a letter from an acquaintance at Monterey, asking him to put us into good hands. Plenty of people know where we are, and a cry would be raised about us in the event that we should be reported missing. Our personal safety is consequently assured. As to our property, Mexicans have the name—that is, the lower class of them—of being natural-born thieves. Perhaps the charge is ill-founded or exaggerated. I have frequently found this the case with people of foreign parts. Now, the windows, if you will examine them, are exactly like all the others in the house. It is evident that there have never been any bolts on them, for it would be impossible to remove the traces, and this wood is many years old. The same thing is true of the door. If I were here alone I should undress, fall asleep within five minutes, and be ready to wager a thousand silver dollars that I should awake safe and sound to-morrow morning."

Esther listened with gradually brightening countenance.

"If you were alone?" she repeated. "Yes, but *you* are not a woman!"

He thought it best to admit this charge without prevarication, and did it in a way that brought the smiles to her cheek.

"You are quite right, my child," he said. "If I were a woman I should be rather more inclined to caution and perhaps to fear. Now, what are you to do? Undoubtedly you will have to remain in this house over night. There being no bars or bolts, you will not be able to lock these windows. What then? What but engage a guard, who would lay down his life before he would permit any person to enter your chamber?"

Miss Strange let her gaze rest on the bare floor at her feet. She expected the opportunity would be utilized for a declaration of love and she did not know exactly how it should be met under these peculiar circumstances.

"The only guard I could trust," he continued, seeing that she was not going to speak, "is myself."

She looked up then, and studied his face intently.

"There is a bed," he added, pointing to it. "That is for you. Here is a mat on the floor, which can be moved to the vicinity of the doorway. That will do for me. Your couch may be the softer, but I will warrant my sleep will not be disturbed."

Esther turned her face slowly toward all sides of the room, as if searching for a better plan. She was apprehensive of some danger, but she knew not in what direction it lay. Her femininity rose above all else, and made her wish this man, so much more self-contained and stronger than she, would take her in his arms and tell her these things with her head

resting on his breast. That would not be conventional, but she wanted something that would soothe her, as a child wants its mother when it awakes and cannot see anything in the dark.

"Very well," she assented, at last.

She rose and walked to the bed to examine it. Then she took off her hat and laid it on the table and made a few other preparations to assume a recumbent position.

Maybury found two rugs instead of one, and announced the discovery with an appearance of glee. He removed his shoes, and rolling them in one rug, made a very good pillow, over which he spread his coat.

He could not help laughing at the ridiculous situation, but the girl did not join him in this pleasantry.

"Shall I put out the light, Miss Giddy, or will you?" he asked, as there seemed nothing more to do.

"We will let it burn."

He wondered he had not thought of that idea himself.

"Good-night," he said, ten minutes later, from his place on the floor; but she made no answer. Could it be she had fallen asleep so soon, after all her fright?

CHAPTER XXVI

A NIGHT AT GARCIA.

No, Esther was not so soon asleep. She did not want to answer her companion, lest one beginning of conversation should bring on still more. She had recovered to a great degree from her fear of intruders, believing that the theories Maybury had advanced were probably correct ones. If the Mexicans had intended to assault or rob her they would be more likely to have lulled her fears than to do all they could to arouse them. But this figure lying on the mats, this countryman of her own, this thorough gentleman, educated and refined—how sure could she be of *him!*

Time settled these things. Used to adventure, experienced in travel in many lands, Maybury was not long in finding oblivion. Twenty minutes after he laid his head on his improvised pillow he was thoroughly unconscious. It was an hour later when the young girl on the bed followed his example, and slumber came to her at the very moment when she least expected it. She had made up her mind not to go to sleep. She was studying the problem of how to conduct herself in case things took on certain disagreeable phases of which she could conceive; and in the midst of that she was gone.

Tired with the events of the day, neither of the sleepers awoke for many hours. It was Douglass who first opened his eyes. For a moment he could not remember where he was. Then his gaze wan-

dered to his bed, on which the sleeping figure was seen, in an attitude of childlike ease and rest. The face was turned toward him. In her sleep Esther looked three or four years younger than she really was. He was charmed by the repose of the slumberer, by the scattered hair that hung over her forehead, by the flush of health that filled the cheek. The girl had lain down in her street clothes, and the skirts enveloped her limbs, all but a suspicion of stocking that showed above her stout boots, worn for mountain climbing.

Ah, but she was pretty! If only he might have gone to her and awakened her with the faintest touch of a kiss! But, no, it must not be. His first kiss from her, if it ever came, should have her consent as its basis; and that consent this was not the time to ask or obtain.

Rising noiselessly, Maybury opened the outer door that had given him such doubt on the preceding evening, and close to which he had passed the night. It led into a large yard, used for the stalling of horses, a yard surrounded by a low adobe wall, over which a man could easily have climbed. Such lack of precaution against burglars argued well for this half-heathen land in comparison with the Christian commonwealths of his own country. It was likely that the money he and Esther carried exceeded the yearly income of any family of that village, and yet no one had been tempted to assail them. He recalled the dark visage of the landlord as he announced his personal responsibility for the safety of his guests and their property. It was apparent that this functionary was injured in his feelings by the

insinuation that he kept a house in which danger might lie.

Going to the kitchen, which he could see on the other side of the yard, Maybury found the wife and daughters of his host, and laying down a piece of silver money he asked that one of them go to awaken the lady who came with him, and to render her all the assistance possible in making her toilet.

The young woman to whom the money was given exchanged a few words with the others before departing on her errand. They were strange people, those Americanos, she said. They seemed as afraid of their wives as if women were wild animals from the Gulf mountains. Undoubtedly this Señor and his Señora had been quarreling again ; and yet they were outwardly pleasant to each other. The father had told them of the alarm of his guests lest some one should rob them in the night, and they had laughed derisively over the idea. Rob, in Garcia ! How far would the robbers get ere the *guarda rurales* would be down on them. And then what? It would be " bang-bang !" No trouble of a trial, no expense for attorneys. A couple of shots and a shallow grave in the sand.

A man might sleep in the open air with a bag of money by his side, in Garcia ! And even if it were not for the rurales, who in the place would disgrace it by stealing from a stranger? Every one there knew every one. The possession of ten dollars more than he could account for, would direct suspicion with unerring aim to a guilty party. The country north of the Rio Grande must be a very dangerous place. They would not like to have to go there.

Americanos were so suspicious, they slept like owls in the peaceful nights!

When Esther awoke and found the young Mexican girl bending over her she had a momentary fright. She looked at the place where Maybury had slept, to see if he was still there, and then at the doors and windows. The true condition of things dawned upon her, however, as the landlord's daughter stood waiting as if for orders, and she summoned the few words in Spanish which she had acquired, to ask for water, towels and other necessary articles, not one of which was to be seen on the premises. Everything was brought, after some delay, and then Esther wanted one thing more—a mirror—which she had not the least idea how to express in the Spanish tongue. Considerable pantomime failed to convey to the waitress the desired information, and finally she departed and brought her mother, to whom Esther renewed the signs. At last the elder woman said something to her daughter, who vanished and returned with a broken looking-glass, not over clean. Having her principal wants now supplied, Miss Strange dismissed them both and completed her preparations for breakfast.

She expected Mr. Maybury would call, but after waiting a long time for him she ventured out alone. Passing rather timidly through a group of rancheros, all of whom saluted her respectfully with "Buenas dias," the girl went out of doors and saw her companion at some little distance, engaged in contemplating the landscape.

"Good-morning," she said to him, as she came within vocal range.

He turned, looked at her anxiously, and took several steps in her direction.

"You—you have slept well?" he asked, devouring her with his eyes.

"Perfectly," she answered. "And I am quite ashamed that I allowed you to make such a sacrifice for me as to sleep on the floor. I am convinced that I would have been as safe alone as if I had brought a squad of soldiers."

She was so bright and bore so little evidence of having passed the night in other than her ordinary way that he resumed his usual demeanor. As for himself, he said, the floor was an old friend of his. He had fared much worse, often on the bare ground, in Africa.

"I came to your conclusion early," he added. "And I felt that if any one should attack me, I was safe under your protection."

She laughed at his humor. They were drawn nearer to each other than they ever had been, by their isolation. She wished once more that he would offer to kiss her, and she knew she would scream loud enough to be heard a mile if he did.

"I suppose," said Mr. Maybury, "you would prefer to start this morning for Monterey, or perhaps New York, to going horseback with only myself and a couple of guides, to the Cave of La Virgen?"

Esther shook her head with decision.

"So far from having that opinion, I would go to the cave even if you returned and left me here," she replied. "I could not be frightened again, and I am simply crazy for adventure. If there was only some place where we could get an American breakfast I would ask for nothing more. I am dying of

hunger and I fear to encounter what may be on that table yonder."

He answered that she had been brought up too daintily, and that the first requisite in such a country as Mexico was to forget all preconceived notions regarding food. At that moment one of the landlord's men came to announce that the morning meal was ready, and with a grimace that the messenger could not see, Esther started with her escort for the dining-room.

The dining-room, it may be said, was also the kitchen, and there is every probability that it served for the sleeping-room for part of the family retainers as well. The average Nineteenth Century descendant of the Aztec and Toltec is not luxurious in these things. Most of the Mexican servants employed by foreigners ask nothing but the privilege of lying on the kitchen or hallway floors when sleep overtakes them.

Around the board were already seated the host, and five or six rancheros, Esther being the only woman guest of the establishment, and perhaps the only one it had ever known. Both of the Americans were sufficiently hungry to eat heartily of the eggs, coffee, milk and bread offered them, for the landlord knew that the "Spanish breakfast" of coffee and bread alone would not suffice for these people. No unpleasant attention was shown by any of the men to the American girl, though the women of the house watched her narrowly and discussed her in whispers.

When the meal was ended Maybury asked the landlord to get the horses and guides as soon as possible, that they might begin their ride to the cave

before the day grew too warm. Although the man replied that he would do so, and actually gave the preliminary directions, the dilatoriness of the country was manifest.

There were numberless causes for delay. One of the saddles—the one to be used by the lady—required repairs, which consumed an hour. The principal guide could not be found, not having been notified the previous evening, as he should have been. A permit to visit the cave must be obtained from the agent of its owner. Then, when the hands of the watch pointed to half-past nine, the travelers, with one of the guides, started through the village, and were suddenly halted for a good half hour in front of the bakery, where the bread they were to take as part of their lunch was being baked.

Maybury fretted a little, but Esther did not mind these things in the least. They were only sources of amusement to her, and she laughed good-naturedly at his wrinkled forehead. As no one could tell how long the bread would be in baking, the travelers rode their horses over to the store kept by Señor Hernandez, whom Maybury questioned anew as to the character of his landlord and the safety of guests in a house that was not ornamented with locks. The señor answered positively that nothing could be more secure. The landlord was the principal man in the place. No one had ever complained of his usage there. Then he was asked about the guides that had been engaged, and of whom one, José, had not yet been found. "Ah, if you have José, you are all right," he said. "There is no guide like José. And also he speaks a little of the

English. Yes, he will be discovered. He has not gone far. There is time enough. The cave will remain there until you reach it."

Returning to the bakery it was learned that a wonderful thing had happened. Not only had the bread completed its apprenticeship in the oven and been transferred with other food to the carrier horse, but the sought-for José had actually arrived and could now be found at his residence a little farther down the street. The steeds were soon speeding toward the place indicated, followed by quite a large-sized collection of half-grown children, who regarded Esther as a genuine curiosity.

Ten minutes at José's door, and then the chief guide appeared, a handsome, bright-eyed young man, at sight of whom the travelers took renewed courage. At the entrance of the adobe house were two women, whom he introduced as "My sis'" and "My li'l wife." The latter was very young, hardly more than fifteen, if so much, and much abashed in the presence of the foreign lady. She was dressed in a gown of calico, which seemed to constitute her only garment. Her bare feet were as brown as her hands, but her face was considerably lighter than her husband's, or indeed any of the natives about her.

As soon as the limits of the village were reached all of the horses were spurred into a gentle canter. Esther felt the exhilaration of the ride and of the delightful air, as balmy in that month of March as it would be in the best part of a Northern June. Along the poorly cultivated road occasional cherry-trees were seen hanging full of blossoms. Fields to the right or the left were sterile or rich in green,

according to the lack or abundance of water, so unevenly distributed in this territory. But all the sky was clear

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE VIRGIN'S CAVE.

José proved from the first the most entertaining of guides. He had learned his English, he said, on the coast, though he was born in Garcia. Esther talked with him whenever the horses came to a walk, finding him as interesting as the country through which she was passing.

"Have you any children?" she inquired, when she was on easy terms with the young fellow. The pretty wife she had seen at his cabin door was continually before her mind.

"No; got none," replied José. "Neb' had none child'en."

"There are many in your village."

José nodded assent, gravely.

"Yes, it's so. Many child'en in village, but my li'l wife neb' had none."

Thinking she detected a trace of regret in his tone, Esther was silent for several minutes. Maybury was riding by her side, and she fancied that he wore a look of comical interest in her queries.

"How long have you been married?" she asked the guide.

"Been marry ten week; ten week marry to my li'l wife; an' neb' had no child'en."

Maybury could not help laughing outright, to

save his life. But José looked at him with the same immovable gravity he had hitherto shown. Esther reddened with vexation, and for some time left the conversation to the men of the party. However, the subject of the guide's wife could not quite be dropped and she ventured to enter upon it again after a time.

"Your wife is much whiter than any of your people, José. She must have white people's blood in her."

The guide listened attentively.

"Look lige it," he answered, gutterally.

Maybury restrained his laughter this time and the horses were urged again into a canter. It was said to be ten miles to the cave, but it was a long road for that distance. Very little of it was shaded in the least. The only people met on the way were donkey-men with loads of wood strapped on the backs of their beasts, attesting the poverty of the country. It was learned that these loads, which consumed a long day in cutting and conveying to the town, brought only thirty to fifty cents, and part of this had to be paid to the inexorable owner of the mountain-side, or the municipal authorities. The donkey-men were barefooted and poorly clad, but they saluted the travelers with polite expressions and were doubtless contented with their lot. All of them seemed to know the guides.

It was noon when the travelers reached the bottom of the mountain in which the Cueva de la Vergen was located. José asked if they would like to stop here for lunch before attempting the climb, but both Maybury and Miss Strange said they preferred reaching the mouth of the cave before breaking their

fast. Dismounting merely to rest their animals for a few minutes, they were soon again in the saddle and upon the upward road. And now began one of the most tiresome of journeys. The cave entrance was at least four thousand feet away by the winding path from the valley. The road was paved with rolling stones, which not only gathered no moss, but made a most insecure footing for the horses. Sometimes it was doubtful whether the beasts advanced or receded after taking a forward step.

José responded to all suggestions that they were quite used to it, and that they had made the journey many times before. All roads have an end, and in an hour after starting from the base of the hill, the travelers reached their destination and saw the opening of the cave just above them.

Both were perspiring under the hot sun of midday, and very glad to dismount again. The assistant who had come with José took off the saddles and tethered the horses near by. To a question what they were to eat he answered that it was much better for them not to touch food until they reached home at night. Esther looked with pity at the jaded animals, but she could do nothing to aid them. No provender had been brought, and except for what branches they might break from the scrub-trees of the mountain-side they were not likely to get anything. To her blank look Maybury replied that the guide was right according to the usually accepted theories of the rancheros. He had known of men riding seventy-five miles on the prairies, without feeding their horses until they reached their destination. It was said they did better work on empty stomachs.

"Nevertheless," he added, "that rule does not apply to human beings, and I am very glad it does not, for I am famished. Give us what lunch you have there, José, and let us begin to eat before we explore the inside of this wonderful freak of nature here."

It was lucky that both of the travelers were hungry. The lunch turned out to consist only of bread, boiled eggs, and warm water, the latter brought in bottles. As they had eaten eggs for supper and breakfast, their landlord had naturally concluded that nothing would be more agreeable to them for lunch. The ride had so sharpened their appetites that neither criticised the quality of the refreshment, and even the warm water was swallowed with gusto, they taking turns at the bottle in true comrade fashion.

It was three o'clock when they entered the cave. José had brought with him a long cord and several candles. He lit one of the candles and divided the rest of them with his employer. Then he took one end of the cord and began to penetrate into the interior of the cave, leaving the rest of it in the hands of Mr. Maybury, who was to assist Esther along and follow the guide by means of the communication thus established.

For some time this worked very well. Within a quarter of an hour a lovely region was found, in which the stalactites and stalagmites were most wonderful. The explorers climbed up steep inclines and down precipitous ways, turning to the right and left in a puzzling fashion. Their progress was necessarily slow and the candles gave but a very imperfect light to their pathway. Lost in admiration of the beauties every moment disclosed, they filled the

air with exclamations. One candle being half-burned out they left it standing on a shelf of the rock, as they had been directed to do, and lit another to carry with them. Once in a while they could hear the voice of José calling out, and their answers reverberated with a thousand echoes.

All at once a gigantically tall chamber loomed before them. Pressing forward, delighted with what they saw, they found they could make much faster progress than before. On the other side of the room, for such it appeared to be, a gallery was reached, that looked as if carved out of the rock with human hands. Along this the explorers passed, until the second candle was half-burned, when Maybury stopped to leave it like the other, as a mark to their returning road.

"Why," he said, turning about, "you have not got hold of the cord!"

"No," said Esther, "I supposed you had it."

It was true. In their impetuosity neither of them had thought for the previous twenty minutes of that important matter.

"What idiots!" cried Maybury, with vexation. Then he called out in a loud voice:

"José! José!"

The echoes were tremendous, but no human voice, so far as they could tell, answered.

"José! José!" called Douglass again. No reply came.

"We shall have to retrace our steps," he said. "It is too bad! We were getting along so well."

Backward they crept, pausing every hundred feet to cry out again for "*José!*" And for all they could

hear the world might have come to an end and every other person in it but themselves have died.

"This is useless," said Maybury, at last. "We must have mistaken our way, or we should have reached a candle by this time. We might as well sit down here and wait for him to find us. He will notice by-and-by that we are not coming."

The candle he held gave a very faint and flickering light. Winds from unknown and mysterious sources blew around them in little gusts that interfered with its diminutive flame. He could see that his girl companion had summoned courage to meet the emergency, instead of preparing to scream or faint, as so many of her sex would have done. Both knew that there were grave dangers in connection with their situation. This cave had never been thoroughly explored. It might take José a long time to find them. However, Douglass had evidently hit upon the best plan, when he decided to remain still for the present. They could not be more than an eighth of a mile, or at the most a quarter, from the entrance. They sat down on the hard floor and talked in low tones, the better to hear in case their guide's voice should reach them. And every few minutes Maybury hallooed with all his might, "*José!* I say, *José!*"

Nothing came of it all, and finally, despairing of getting rescued in this way, the explorers began again to search for the outer world. They were quite sure that the exit lay in a certain direction, and that they should not be at a disadvantage by going that way, Maybury took his knife and cut marks in the rock—scratches that he could recognize—so that he might return if it seemed wise. But though they walked a good deal farther than it had taken

them in the first place they heard nothing of the guide, nor did he, so far as they could ascertain, hear anything of them.

When all of the candles that Maybury carried were burned out but one, he looked at his watch, and told Esther, with a nervous feeling, that it was now seven o'clock. Not a particle of natural light penetrated those depths. It might have been bright day or midnight outside, for all the difference it would have made there.

"I am afraid," said Douglass, falteringly, "that José has gone back or sent his assistant, to get help from the village to find us. In that case it is more than likely that, with Spanish slowness, they will not enter on their work before to-morrow morning. We ought to save this remaining candle to use in following their voices when they come for us."

Esther looked at him steadily, and answered "Yes."

"I shall be obliged, I fear, to occupy the same room with you again to-night," he continued, with a grim attempt at pleasantry. "While the light is burning let me arrange your couch, which will not be any too comfortable at the best."

She stood there silently while he selected the safest place he could find, and taking off his coat, rolled it up for a pillow.

"It is all I have to offer," he said, gallantly, pointing to it with a gesture that suggested immediate possession.

"I will not take it!" she retorted, with dignity. "You have absolutely nothing left for yourself."

"Oh, yes," he laughed. "A man is never without

means to make a pillow. He always has—his boots."

She shook her head decidedly.

"You shall not lie down without your coat. You would be sure to catch cold. There is—there is—a better way."

Maybury wondered what she would suggest. The candle had burned very low and would not last much longer.

"Put on your coat again and take off your boots," she said, in a scarcely audible voice, "and lie down with them under your head. Then I will show you."

He smilingly complied, like a slave whose duty it is to obey. Before he did so, however, he put the remaining candle within easy reach, and his match-box also.

"I am here," he said, when all was ready. "And now—what?"

The girl advanced toward him. She knelt by his side and drew his left arm out from his body. Gazing intently into his eyes by the last expiring glimmer of the candle she drooped her face nearer and nearer to his, until their lips met!

It was the last thing on earth he had imagined. The effect upon him for the moment was to turn him into stone.

Then Esther laid her head on the arm she had arranged for her pillow, and saying "Good-night, Douglass," went away to dreamland.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I MUST CONFESS SOME THINGS."

The condition of the previous night was completely reversed. Then it was Douglass who slept and Esther who lay awake until she could hear the regular breathing that showed he was unconscious. Now it was the young girl who allowed the arms of Morpheus as well as those of her companion to envelop her.

She was very tired, for one thing. The long ride in the hot sun, the hard climb of the mountain-side, the uncertain footing in the cave during the four hours she had ascended and descended its winding ways, had nearly exhausted her slight strength. But more than this was the feminine longing for protection from the unseen dangers that might lurk in that gloomy cavern. The child hides its head in its mother's lap, and defies the world to injure it. The woman in the extremity of fear seeks the sheltering arms of the man she loves.

The man she loves? Yes, Douglass Maybury was the man that Esther loved. She had not meant he should know it for a long time yet, but the circumstances proved too much for her. Her action told him what she might have concealed for months. As her lips touched his he knew her secret, and when her head pressed his arm a thrill passed through him.

Nearly as tired as the girl, Maybury soon slumbered by her side. When he awoke he found her sitting up, and for an instant thought she had wan-

dered from him. She quieted his fears by saying that she had just awakened, and asked him to light a match and see what time it was. A look at his watch showed that it was five in the morning, or at least they both concluded it was morning, knowing that it was seven at night when they lay down.

With the expiring glimmer of the match the darkness seemed more inky than before. As neither of them wanted sleep they began to talk of their situation, and of the probability that José would be able to reach them with a rescuing party. It was clear to both that they must have wandered a good long way from the mouth of the cave, otherwise some of their calls should have been heard by the guide. Maybury said he had no fears, for he would not have admitted any in the presence of this girl, and she answered encouragingly that no doubt they would be out by noon, thankful that he could not see the faltering lip with which she made the statement.

"I would give a thousand reals for a good breakfast, all the same," said Douglass. "You must be starved to death, poor child!"

"I'm not *very* hungry," she answered. "I would rather have a good lamp than all the food in Mexico. I don't like to have my room so dark at this time in the morning, I must admit."

"It's light enough outside," he said, with an attempt at humor. "If only our curtains weren't stuck down so!"

They decided that it would be the height of folly to take a single step further, when there was no way to tell whether they were going toward the entrance or away from it. The best thing was to stay where they were, listening for any sound that indicated

human life. The morning passed, however, and nothing came to give them the least encouragement. At what seemed very long intervals Douglass would illumine the cave for a moment while he consulted his watch, only to find that less than an hour had usually elapsed since the last inspection of its impassive face. At last the womanly nature of Esther gave way under the strain. She put her arms around his neck and began to sob softly on his bosom.

"They will never find us!" she said. "We shall be left here to die! Oh, why did we ever come!"

Intensely distressed, he kissed away her tears, and tried to reassure her, pretending to have heard something that sounded like voices, and bidding her hush that he might listen again. When it was evident that nothing in the shape of human beings bore any trace of being near, the girl resumed her weeping and clung passionately to her companion, her entire frame shaken with her emotion.

"We shall die here, I am sure of it," she said, when she could speak intelligibly. "You will have lost your life for me. If I had not been with you, you would have held to that cord, but you let go of it thinking I had it in my own hand. Ah, is it not terrible that one I love so well should suffer through my fault! Listen to me: It can do no harm to tell you now, when we are so near the end of our lives. I have loved you ever since that day you met me in the street—a poor, friendless little girl—and stopped to discuss with me the one hope that made my existence bearable."

There was little to be gained by stopping her. It

comforted her in her deep distress and Maybury allowed her to proceed.

"I must confess some things to you," proceeded Esther, with trembling voice. "I learned a few months ago who gave all the money to educate me, unselfishly, generously, nobly, making no claim in return, acting out the honorable nature that was in him. I knew, in spite of what you told me in New Orleans, that he was neither old nor ugly, that he was in fact high-born, young and handsome. I had called at Mr. Chitty's office for some money. He went to one of his clerks and asked him in a whisper to bring the account-book of one of his clients. My ears are quick and the name came to me with perfect distinctness. In a second everything was clear. And when, the next month, the school caught fire, and I was free for the rest of the year, and I found by a newspaper that my dear benefactor was in the South, nothing would do but I must look on his face once more. And when I saw him, as good, as handsome, as generous as ever, I was impelled to go to Mexico with him, because I knew such a man would deal with me as honestly as if I were his sister. I knew he would not mistake me, and time has proved that I was right. But I did not dream that in following the footsteps I loved so well I should take them to the grave."

Hysterically she clung to him and her voice was choked as she uttered the astonishing sentences. Almost crushed by what he heard, Maybury had neither the courage nor the heart to utter the denial that rose to his lips.

"I should not have thought you would have dared go to New Orleans entirely alone," he ventured.

"But it was the *second* time I had been there," she confessed. "Yes, the previous Mardi Gras I had gone also to Mobile, to spend a short vacation with my teacher, and she had taken me to New Orleans to witness the parade of the Carnival. I knew you were there, though I did not suspect in the least your connection with my fortunes. I only remembered you as the kind young gentleman of a bygone day, whose face had ever been dear to my memory. I procured a ticket to a ball that I had accidentally heard you were to attend, and—'

She stopped, for her companion, forgetting the darkness, rose to his feet.

"It was *you*—at that ball!" he said, in freezing accents. "It—was—*you!*"

"Yes," she admitted. "I had been looking for you in vain, all over the city, and almost despaired of finding you when you came out of a restaurant on Canal street, early that evening. Another gentleman was with you, and I could not very well make myself known. I walked behind you for several blocks, hoping you would soon be alone, but the gentleman went as far as your room on St. Charles street, and you immediately went up the stairs. The last thing he said as he parted from you was this: 'What time shall I meet you and where?' 'At the Pickwick,' you answered, 'about one o'clock to-night.' 'Remember, if you miss me,' he said, 'it is the ball of the Well-Known Gentlemen.' I returned to my hotel, waited till my friend was asleep, and went to the hall where the ball was in progress. When you arrived, hidden behind my mask, I spoke to you."

Maybury was staggered. He leaned against the

shelf of rock under which he had passed the night, and wondered if he were sleeping or waking.

"It cannot be you are speaking the truth," he stammered, finally. "How should you know where the 'Well-Known Gentlemen' were to hold the ball?"

"I engaged a young man, a brother of one of the hotel boys, to go with me to the place. From his unrestrained chatter I learned about its character also, and on the way we stopped and I bought a mask. I am not easily deterred when I start to do a thing, and I was determined to see you."

The young man's head was in a whirl. How could he reconcile the past with the present?

"I simply cannot believe you," he said, slowly. "But, when we are out of this trouble, if you will show me the mate to that article you dropped on the ball-room floor in the midst of your dance, I will say no more."

For an instant, as Esther began to understand this request, her eyes gave forth such fire as should have served to lighten the cavern.

"How can you insult me like this!" she cried. "How can you compare me to that shameless creature whose dance I would not even cross the room to witness! Oh, it is scandalous! And I have put such confidence, such faith in you, notwithstanding all I saw and heard that terrible night!"

Had the roof of the cave fallen, broken in fragments, at his feet, Douglass Maybury would not have been much more perturbed. He saw the dreadful error he had committed, and as soon as he could speak he proffered his most humble and sincere apologies. He reminded the sobbing girl that both

the women who spoke to him that night were equally hidden from his eyes, with nothing to give the least indication of their identity. But he could not console her. She felt that the insult was too deep for immediate forgiveness. After striving in vain to get her to speak the words of pardon, he gave up the attempt in despair.

It was now past the hour of noon, and a faint feeling began to oppress him. The lack of dinner, breakfast and lunch was doing its work on his digestive organs. His courage, strong while his companion gave him her sympathy and love, began to wane. There were only two or three matches left, and but the one candle which he had not yet dared to light. In his distress he bethought himself of his pistol, and, telling Esther what he was about to do, he began firing it at intervals of two or three minutes, hoping that the reports would attract attention from the outside, and possibly serve as a clue for the rescuers who, he was sure, must ultimately arrive.

The shots made a terrific roar in the vaulted chamber. The echoes re-echoed it seemed a hundred times before they relapsed into perfect stillness. Esther felt a new terror each time the noise was repeated. She wished heartily she had again around her those protecting arms, or at least that her companion's hand might be clasped in hers during the unearthly reverberations. As Maybury was about to empty the last chamber of the revolver, the ears of the watchers were startled by the sound of another pistol, at a long distance away, but seemingly also inside the cave. Douglass turned his head toward

the place where Esther sat, and knew instinctively that she was also looking in his direction.

"Did you hear a sound?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It was not the mere echo of my last shot?"

"No. It was quite different."

"Then they have begun to search for us!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "Esther, we are saved!"

He groped toward the girl, intending to clasp her to his heart in thankfulness, but she had divined his purpose and moved away. Even the pleasure of a rescue could not blot the fact from her mind that he had thought her capable of an infamous exhibition before a crowd of disreputable people. It seemed doubly cruel after she had done violence to her maiden modesty by unveiling the deep affection she had conceived for him. Five minutes earlier she would have joined in his rejoicing, but for the moment she could not utter a word.

It was more than two hours before the rescuers reached them. The passages in the cave were intricate and numerous. They could hear the voices of José and of their Garcia landlord long before Maybury could make his own voice heard in return. And after that it was some time before they could talk so as to be understood by each other. But the rescuers reached them at last, and their bright lanterns sent a still greater ray into the hearts that had nearly given up to despair.

José had been to the village and brought six men with him, besides a quantity of rope and plenty of candles. He had been as quick about it as it is possible for any one having a strain of Spanish blood in

him to be, and he thought he had spent a marvelously short time in the work.

The travelers were regaled with another instalment of eggs, bread and water, which they did not hesitate this time to accept with thankfulness. The Mexicans noticed, however, that the Americano said little to his "wife," and that when he did she replied briefly. "They have been quarreling again," said the landlord to himself. "What can they have to fight about, for the love of God!"

"You are too tired to ride as far as Garcia to-night, are you not?" asked Maybury, when the lunch was disposed of.

She looked about her in wonder.

"I cannot stay here," she replied, with a shade of petulence.

"No, but José tells me there is a mining-camp a few miles away, where we can get shelter."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"I had rather endure the ride," she said. "We have plenty of time before dark. We can go slowly."

He sat down by her, unmindful of the eyes that watched them.

"Esther, my dear girl," said he, "forgive me. You must see I did an unintentional injury to your feelings. Had the cave been light you would have read the incredulity in my countenance at the idea I gained from your statement. I am certain you are all that is good and pure."

She turned her swimming eyes full upon him.

"How can I make you understand?" she said. "All last night I lay in your arms, with as little thought of wrong as a bird in its nest. I knew you were not all that a man should be, but I thought at

least you had respect for my unhappy situation, and that toward me your thoughts would be untainted. And in a moment I saw you had conceived me a woman capable of any evil. It is horrible! I cannot forget it!"

He wisely said no more to her at the time, but directed José to have the animals made ready. The homeward journey was begun, and the ten miles consumed four hours.

At bed-time Esther said she had lost her fear of being alone and asked him to get another room; to which he made a brief but pointed refusal.

"I will not," he replied. "If any harm should happen to you I should never forgive myself. I shall sleep on the floor as I did the other night. I am getting quite fond of hard mattresses," he said, trying to smile.

She shut her lips closely together.

"I positively forbid you to enter my room," she said, coldly.

"And I refuse to obey. There are no bolts or locks, and you cannot keep me out."

"You are acting outrageously," said the girl, having recourse again to weeping.

Maybury did not reply in words. He took Esther by the arm and walked into the chamber with her as if she were a child.

"Go to bed and sleep," he said. "You may have an illness from your exposure, if you are not careful."

Making a bed again on the floor he curled himself up, with his boots for a pillow. But try as he might it was a long time before he could slumber.

"Last night's arrangement was ever so much better," he murmured aloud. "It's as dark here now

as it was there. Esther, come and give me one kiss, that's a good girl."

But Esther did not stir. Her pillow was wet with her fast falling tears. This man whom she had learned to love so much, had suspected her, and how could she tell where it all might end?

CHAPTER XXIX.

"AH! IT IS TERRIBLE! TERRIBLE!"

Sleep is a great restorer of the nervous system. When the following morning dawned Esther Strange woke before her protector. She saw by the faint light that peeped in through the close shutters that Mr. Maybury was still lying stretched on the hard floor of the room, and she experienced a feeling of remorse for the harsh things she had said to him. How could he have treated her with more consideration. There were few men, she opined, who would have been as gentle, as thoughtful as he.

He opened his eyes and saw her gaze fixed upon him.

"What, you awake!" he exclaimed, rising immediately. "It must be later than I supposed. No, it is only six o'clock. Nothing is the matter, I hope."

"Nothing," said the girl, "except that I am sorry for what I said last night, and want you to forget it as soon as you can."

Her voice proclaimed the earnestness of her desire, and he took a step nearer the bed on which

she lay. Then, recollecting himself, he walked away from her and opened the outer door.

"Don't spend a moment over that matter," he replied, lightly. "If we were to discuss it an hour I should only agree with all you might say. It was a bad slip, I know that as well as you. Lie as late as you please, and when you are ready I will send the girl to assist you again."

It was neither the time nor place to go into further details, and Esther refrained from doing so, knowing that she could express herself more fully at a later period. But she did say that she was quite ready to rise, and would like to see the landlord's daughter at once.

After breakfast the question arose as to what should next be done. The travelers had brought all their baggage with them, not having fully decided whether or not to return to Monterey. Douglass tried to ascertain what Esther preferred, but in her repentant mood she insisted on leaving the entire matter to him. Try as he might he could not get her to express a preference for any place or route. At last, finding that she was determined he should decide, he said they would go on south, stopping at Saltillo the first day.

Meek as any feminine Moses, Esther got into the lumbering old vehicle that carried passengers from the "hotel" to the station, two miles or more away, and left Garcia with her escort. Two days at Saltillo were quite enough to inspect its wonders. A train on the National railroad bore them on to Catorce, where they made the steep ascent to the mining town and enjoyed immensely the novel experience. Then, after a good rest, they went to

San Luis Potosi, which the guide-book told them was in the midst of a fertile plain, but which the long absence of rain had reduced for the time to a wind-swept desert. Instead of earning a living by supplying food, as in most cities, the inhabitants of San Luis seemed mostly engaged in selling water. At the nearly dry public wells, and the barely running public fountains, the ragged vendors of this prime necessity were struggling with each other to husband the few gills that could be obtained. It was sad to see to what depths of misery the refusal of the elements to perform their functions had reduced a population ordinarily happy and prosperous.

Leaving San Luis the travelers stopped at several other places of minor interest, and then reached the capital of the country.

It was April when they arrived in the City of Mexico. They found rooms for the present in the Hotel Jardin, that peculiar hostelrie located in what was, like many other prominent buildings in that section, a convent in the olden time. The strong hand of Juarez curbed by a sweeping act of confiscation the power of the church and its satellites that would have made a religious oligarchy out of what the people preferred should be a republic. It will remain for his successors to make this wonderful old city one of the most attractive residential towns in the world, by their new system of drainage.

Although it was now becoming rather too warm to suit the Northerners, they would have remained there much longer, had it not been for a letter which Maybury received. This letter was in the handwriting of Dr. Parton, and conveyed the information that Senator Scarlett had died suddenly

while in the West. As it would have taken a full week for his son-in-law to reach New York it had been deemed inexpedient to telegraph him to attend the funeral, and the obsequies had taken place with only the usual delay. It appeared from Dr. Parton that heart disease was the cause assigned, and that no one had suspected the existence of the trouble until its fatal termination. The Senator, in death as in life, was found with a smile on his lips.

"Mrs. Maybury, already in a most precarious state of health," wrote the doctor, in closing, "is naturally much prostrated. She thinks it best, from a business standpoint, that you should come home for a few weeks, but says it will not be possible for her to see you except for the briefest moment. Mr. Bayley would also like to talk with you about the will, of which he is left sole executor. If I were in your place I should not hasten unduly, as everybody knows you are very far from home and will form no unpleasant conclusions."

This was a blow from which it took some time for Maybury to recover, even enough to explain things to Esther. And when he did explain them, he very soon got into a worse state of mind than at first.

The affection which he bore Mr. Scarlett had not been a very great one, and yet he liked that gentleman. He could not forget the consideration the Senator had shown him when he placed the comfortable sum of $250,000 to his credit. It is always a shock when our friends are taken by death. Dr Parton's allusions to Flora were also disturbing. A man may be able to live without his wife, and yet not enjoy being told continually that she is much better off when he is at a distance. There was nothing to

do but to pack up and start for the North, and the prospect was that the next month would be a particularly disagreeable one.

"Bad news, Esther," he told her, when he had spent an hour in a vain attempt to compose his feelings. "Senator Scarlett is dead—the poor millionaire, whose method of acquiring wealth you set me to investigating the first day we met. I shall have to go to New York without delay."

Esther looked sympathetic in answer to the sad face he exhibited.

"I did not know he was any relation to you," she said, simply.

"You surely knew that he was my wife's father."

She had never heard it, never in her wildest imaginations dreamed it. For an instant she did not seem to breathe.

"Your—*what!*"

"Why, you don't tell me you never heard!" said Maybury. "I thought the whole world knew. Did you—did you—you *didn't* think I was—*single!*"

Her face was the color of a dead girl's. Her mind wandered. Was this a real conversation she was having with this man, or was she the victim of some dreadful delusion?

"My dear child," he said, divining the entire truth, "let me tell you everything. I supposed of course you knew, and that is why I never alluded to it in any way. You see—"

She stopped him with a just perceptible gesture.

"Wait!" she articulated, with difficulty. "Wait—a minute!"

Plunged into despair he obeyed, but instead of allowing him to proceed with his explanation she

arraigned him unrelentingly as soon as she could speak, before the bar of her womanhood.

"Married!" she said, in a hoarse whisper. "And here, with me? Married! Oh!"

It was a burst of the most intense anguish. But the tears did not come. The pain was too deep for ordinary means of relief.

"Why did not God let us die in that cave at Garcia!" she cried. "You held me to your heart in what I thought pure, honorable love! And now, what shall I call the relation we hold to each other? Every look you have given me has been untruth to another. Every hour I have kept you from her side, has been so much theft of what was her due."

No, he would not sit there without telling her what there was in palliation of his offense. He had had no doubt that she knew of his marriage to that girl she had seen with the ponies—everybody knew of it, how should he have supposed it had been kept from her? If she had found him wandering from his wife she must have known that there were reasons. He certainly had traveled with Esther without doing anything that could injure her present or future happiness.

"No one can say," he added, "that I have not a right to be in Mexico at the same time as you, or to visit the same places."

But she shook her head despairingly.

"You cannot mitigate it!" she said. "Ah, it is terrible! terrible! What shall I do! How can I bear it!"

Affected beyond measure at her grief, Maybury drew his chair close to hers, and took her hands in his. She did not attempt to draw them away, but

allowed him to stroke them tenderly, while he tried with all his power to comfort her. She must think of herself as his ward, he said. She should always be very dear to him, nothing should separate them. It would be necessary for him to go North at the present time, and she must go also. As soon as he could arrange to be absent again he would take her to some other part of the world, where they would be as happy as if she had never heard of his marriage.

"And will she—that wife of yours—let you go, then?" she asked, incredulously. "Is she satisfied to have you away from her; or are you breaking her heart as you are mine?"

As gently as possible he told her that his wife had advised him to extend his journey; and that, in summoning him now, she had sent a message expressing doubt whether she would be able to see him more than for a few minutes. It was evident that these things gave him genuine unhappiness, but Esther could not probe the matter to the bottom yet. She was sorry for him, however, and his story softened the resentment she had begun to feel, even if it did not assuage her grief.

During the next hour he told her much of the history of his marriage, that she might the better understand the reasons for his conduct. In the course of his tale he happened to mention that her brother Austin was in Mrs. Maybury's service, and the young girl evinced intense surprise. She made him tell her all about it, and at the end relapsed for some time into a brown study, hardly hearing anything her companion was saying.

Esther had no courage left to refuse when Doug-

lass asked her to be ready to start for the United States on the following morning. The dilemma was too great for her. With him, she feared a thousand evils; without him, all was chaos. He was her almoner, her only friend, the one person on earth that she cared for. She would have to go with him. There was no escape.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SURPRISED HUSBAND.

The journey to New York was uneventful. Neither of the travelers were in a mood for saying much. Arriving at the city Esther proceeded to the St. Denis Hotel. Instead of going directly to his home Maybury was taken to the office of David Bayley, whom he was successful in finding within.

"Well, old man," cried the Architect, rising and coming forward with effusion, "I never was so glad to see any one in my life! You must have had a hard trip, to come so far so suddenly. When did you arrive?"

"We'll talk of that some other time," was the constrained reply. "Tell me about everything here. The poor Senator, how did it happen? I cannot understand it; he always looked so well."

Nobody understood it, the Architect answered. He had seemed as well the evening before as a man ever did, and was found dead in his bed the next morning. Oh, well, that was getting to be the fashion. Long

sicknesses were out of date; when a man got ready to go, he never gave notice nowadays. Great shock to his daughter, naturally. Mr. Maybury had noticed it, of course. What? He hadn't been up to the house yet? No? Bayley had heard yesterday that Mrs. Maybury was unable to see anyone but the doctor. Terrible to be so delicate! But, about the will. Douglass must see it and say if there was anything he didn't like. Had to take the thing into court, you know. Business must be attended to, even if people did die. It made *more* business, in fact. Queer, wasn't it, that Bayley had been made executor? Never had an inkling of it, upon his soul! It would give him enough to do for the next few years.

And so he rattled on. And finally he produced the document in question, which for a will that disposed of twenty millions or more, was a very brief one. To Mr. David Bayley it gave the sum of $100,000, as full payment for the duties it confided to him. To Douglass Maybury, $200,000; his residence to his daughter outright; and the rest to his children equally.

"This will takes the place of an older one," explained the Architect, "and was made only a few weeks before the Senator's death. The addition of the house to Mrs. Maybury's part was doubtless influenced by the fact that she is likely to become a mother."

The late Mr. Scarlett's son-in-law stared at the speaker.

"Any woman is likely to be a mother," he answered.

"You do not pretend to be in ignorance of Mrs.

Maybury's present condition?" was the Architect's reply, said with an air of incredulity.

Again Douglass stared at him.

"What do you mean, in plain English?" he asked, rather roughly.

"I mean that your wife is expecting a child early the coming summer."

"You are entirely mistaken," was the frigid answer. "Whoever has told that story is a falsifying busybody."

Bayley leaned back in his office-chair and put his hands into his pockets as far as they would go.

"It's queer if Parton *is* mistaken," he said, musingly. "I really thought he ought to know."

"Did Parton tell you that?" demanded Douglass, flushing hotly.

"As true as you sit there."

Maybury put his hand to his forehead and tried to think. Was the story probable? He could not believe it.

"I am surprised at you," said Bayley. "You know, of course, how ill she has been, and what a time Parton has had pulling her through. He has certainly written to you, for he asked me your address. Why, it is beyond belief!"

Perhaps it *was* true. But if so how doubly guilty he had been, as a husband, to spend his time in travel with an attractive girl, enjoying all he could of the pleasant things of life, while his poor wife was undergoing a physical and mental distress such as a man could only conceive of. She had asked him to remain away from her, indeed, but he was not obliged to go three thousand miles off, and give no thought to her dangerous situation—not even take

the pains to know it—never hear of it until after everybody else was fully informed. How contemptible it was, coming to him in that shape!

"I will go to her at once," he said to himself, "and, if necessary to obtain her pardon, I will beg it on my knees."

He remained but a short time longer at the Architect's. He declared the will satisfactory as far as he was concerned, though he did not understand why Mr. Scarlett had remembered him so kindly. It was an entire surprise and he did not know as he ought to accept it.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Bayley, in response to this suggestion. "You are altogether too sensitive. And let me tell you also, my dear Douglass, that a man in your situation ought to wear a brighter face than you carry around with you. Your time for taking this world seriously is over. You have wealth enough to satisfy all your tastes. You can travel or stay at home, just as it pleases you best. If one set of companions doesn't suit, it is in your power to select another. I don't know as lucky a fellow in the entire country, take it altogether. Why don't you brace up and act like you used to, when you hadn't ten thousand dollars?"

For an instant Maybury thought of confiding in this man, so wise in all the affairs of life. He thought of telling him the condition of his mind and throwing himself upon his generous mercy. But he could not bring himself to it, and, remarking that he would see him again in a day or two, he left the building and took his way on foot to the elegant residence on Fifth avenue.

As he was about to ascend the marble steps a per-

son came down them, stopped, hesitated and then awaited his coming. It was Austin Strange.

"I have just returned," was the brief statement that Maybury made. "Find Madame Saccard and tell her I would like to see her at my rooms."

Silent as ever, never speaking when he could do without words, the young retainer bowed and walked back into the house, making way at the door for the alleged master of the premises to precede him. If Douglass had paid the least attention to his face he would have seen that all color had left it and that there was a twitching of the eyelids that denoted unusual excitement. But he noticed nothing, being too much preoccupied with his troubles, and with a nod or two to the servants he met on his way he sought his own chambers.

Things move slowly in the residences of royalty and of the rich. It was more than an hour before Madame Saccard was ready to see him in his parlor. He rose to welcome the Frenchwoman, with something the air one uses at funerals.

Mrs. Maybury had been apprised of the return of monsieur, said Madame Saccard, and regretted that she was not well enough to meet him at once. Perhaps later in the day she would feel equal to the effort. The lamentable death of her father—ah! Mr. Maybury would appreciate her sentiments.

"Will you tell me," asked the husband, with a directness that surprised himself, "how soon Mrs. Maybury expects to be confined?"

The daughter of Gaul was thrown off her guard for a moment by this pointed inquiry.

"To be confined?" she repeated, uneasily.

"Yes, you understand the term, do you not? When is she to become a mother?"

The five seconds in which this form of the query had been elicited were enough to decide the question that was in the mind of Madame Saccard. It was evident that Monsieur knew of his wife's condition, and there was no reason why she should evade answering.

"I cannot tell you with anything like exactness," she said, acknowledging with a low bow that she comprehended at last. "Dr. Parton will be here at two o'clock and I will tell him that you wish an interview."

The husband wore an anxious look.

"Has she suffered much?"

"Poor lady, yes!"

"And at present, is she any worse than she has been?"

"About the same, I judge. She is up nearly every day, and even goes to ride, but her nerves are terrible."

"Tell the doctor," said Maybury, "that I wish to see him as soon as he is through with her to-day. And please inform the servants that I shall not care for lunch. I am exhausted with travel and wish to get a little sleep."

Madame Saccard indicated that these things would all be attended to, and Douglass was left alone. He found by consulting his watch that it was nearly noon. Utterly tired out he threw off his clothes and got into his bed; and notwithstanding the troubles that preyed upon him it was not ten minutes before he was in the soundest kind of a slumber.

When Parton knocked at his door it was past four

o'clock. The physician had arrived at the house a little later than usual, and his interview with his fair patient had been prolonged beyond the ordinary time. It required a second and third rap to bring the sleeper to the door, and when it was opened the doctor found his old friend in a dressing-robe, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

Without permitting the least delay, absolutely refusing to discuss any other subject till this one was disposed of, Maybury begged Parton to tell him all he could in relation to the health of Mrs. Maybury. The Doctor expressed the greatest surprise to hear that the husband had learned that morning for the first time of the fact of central importance. He had supposed, of course, that he had been informed at the beginning, and had never thought it necessary to allude to it in the letter he had sent. Still, he could account for the reticence of the young wife, considering the extreme nervousness from which she suffered, and the retiring disposition she always showed. Her present condition was slightly improved from what it had been. There was now a strong hope that she would be able to pass the ordeal in safety to herself and offspring. For months the loss of the latter had been feared. When things had been at their worst the heroic lady had refused to have her husband informed, declaring that he should not suffer on account of something which he could neither prevent nor mitigate. Mrs. Maybury had been much prostrated by the news of her father's death, but she had borne it better than it was feared she would.

During the latter part of the Doctor's recital his

auditor found it impossible to control his feelings. Tears rushed to his eyes and flowed down his cheeks.

"Why, this is all wrong!" cried Dr. Parton, briskly. "Your wife has passed through some narrow passages, but the worst is believed to be over. The present situation is one on which we should all congratulate ourselves. Mrs. Maybury has requested me to say that she will meet you to-morrow morning at ten, in her private parlor. All I need add is that you must be wise enough to make the interview brief and say nothing to unduly agitate her."

Maybury could not talk to Parton of what disturbed him, not as well even as he could have done to Bayley. He made no attempt, therefore, to explain the cause of his agitation, but he confined his answers to questions relative to his journey to the very shortest compass.

Warned again to on no account add to the anxiety of his wife, Maybury met Flora at the appointed time with as firm a nerve as he could summon. She was not much paler than of yore, to his relief, and she assumed an air that was almost cheerful. He could not avoid telling her of the South and of Mexico, as he had the others who questioned him, and she expressed the hope that some day she would have the pleasure of seeing the tropical land which she made him describe. Between his desire to obey the injunctions of the Doctor and his fear that if he began to entreat her pardon for his faults he would break down, he was unable to say a word upon the subject on which he most wanted to speak with her. And he left his wife without in the remotest way alluding to her delicate situation.

From the arrival of Maybury in New York, he saw

his wife nearly every day, but never more than a quarter of an hour. The courage which had failed him at the outset did not return. The things he wished to talk about never came upon his lips in her presence. He met Charles frequently, but he had little inclination to confide in the young man, whose whole life was now devoted to the working people upon whom he was expending his entire share of his father's fortune. The only man that Douglass sought much was Mr. Bayley, and that gentleman refrained from all allusions that could possibly have a disagreeable flavor.

It was about the middle of May when the Architect asked his friend to accompany him to Van Buren, upon a business matter connected with the Scarlett estate, of which he was now trustee. Parton, being consulted, urged Douglass to accept, and Flora joined in the advice, saying he needed a change, that he was not looking as well as she could wish. The physician assured the husband that he would notify him if anything special occurred to demand his presence. With this Douglass was fain to be content. The life he was living was indeed wearing on him. A few weeks of change would do him great good. He told Bayley that he would go.

During all this time Esther Strange had been stopping at the St. Denis, living the life of a recluse if not of a hermit. Once a day Mr. Maybury called upon her, and stayed perhaps half an hour. The girl always tried to meet him as cheerfully as possible, but they did not succeed in imparting much joy to each other's countenances. Esther was as strong in urging the Western journey as the others

had been. It was agreed that she would engage a maid and go to an interior city during his absence.

"I am sorry to be such an expense to you," said Esther, when this arrangement was suggested.

"For Heaven's sake never speak of that!" he exclaimed. "Draw all you need from Mr. Chitty, and say nothing. Be a good girl now, till we meet again."

He felt that she would allow him a good-by kiss, but he could not give it. During the weeks he had been at home he had never kissed his wife, and he could not bring himself at this time to offer that salute to another.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FREEZING-OUT PROCESS.

A large part of the State of Van Buren is a wilderness. There was no better reason why it should have been received into the Union than that a few ambitious politicians desired to enter Congress by that door. The mines which the late Senator had left in his executor's charge were in the interior, and required some days of wagon journey after leaving the railroad. When they had been thoroughly inspected there were other lands to see, in which the company's engineers believed quantities of silver lay hidden, and to these points journeys were made on horseback. A month was consumed in this way

instead of the fortnight intended, and it was late in June when a letter was brought to Maybury from Dr. Parton, stating that he was the father of a girl.

Trembling in every limb, Douglass handed this missive to Bayley as soon as he had read it.

"Why the devil did I ever come out here!" he said, dolefully. "Of all times in my life this is the one I should have been at home."

"Not a bit of it!" answered the Architect. "Parton knew what he was about, when he advised you to go away, and so did your wife when she seconded his motion. You would have turned the house topsy-turvey at a time when they needed the utmost quiet. You would have wanted to break into the sick chamber, and when you couldn't do it you would have distracted the physician and nurses asking for half-minute bulletins. Look at the postscript of this letter: 'Mother and child doing well.' I should think that wholly original expression would answer all your doubts. We are through here now, and can start home to-morrow. In eight days we shall arrive, and you will thank your stars that you escaped the most disagreeable strain that any man ever has on his mental equilibrium."

Mr. Maybury tried to see it in this way, but he could not satisfy himself that he was not a heartless wretch. On the homeward trip it took all that the Architect could do to rally him. The night he arrived in New York he fumed because the nurse in charge refused to allow him to enter the room where his wife lay. He took but the most cursory inspection of the infant they brought him, sound asleep in its swaddlings. He had never abused this young lady; *she* was not the person to whom he owed an

apology. He wanted to see Flora and tell her how sorry he was that he had been away at such an unseasonable time.

Before they would let him see his wife the next morning Dr. Parton had to be summoned. It galled the husband to find this personage standing always between him and his other half, but there was no help for it. He was relieved, however, after the doctor had talked with him a few moments, for it appeared that he held the same view that Mr. Bayley had expressed. He declared it a positive piece of luck that the father of the promising child in the other part of the house had not been inside its portals two weeks earlier.

"I should not have known what to do with you," laughed the physician. "You would have been a positive nuisance."

"But supposing she had *died!*" replied Maybury, with a shiver.

"Ah, but she didn't! 'All's well that ends well,' you know."

When Mrs. Maybury received her husband, however, it was evident that she did not take precisely the physician's view. She inquired, with the first touch of ascerbity she had ever shown in his presence, why he had remained away so much longer than he promised when he took his departure. She feared the friends of the family would draw unpleasant inferences, and had given orders that the birth of the child should be concealed from outsiders for the present. Dr. Parton, she said, could be relied upon to show due discretion.

All this and much more the young wife told him from her place on the pillows, and the husband felt

a depression that would have driven him, a year earlier, into drunkenness. The present difficulty could not be solved in that way. If he was ever going to show himself a man, it was high time he set about it.

To his wife Douglass became from this time less acceptable, if possible, than before. When she recovered from her illness she avoided him openly, showing a desire to see him as little as possible. Dr. Parton shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no accounting for the whims of women. He considered Mrs. Maybury fairly well now, and thought his services were not likely to be of much further use. She had formed notions after the birth of her child which he could do nothing to eradicate. It was a common thing for women to receive these impressions, and sometimes it took a very long time to get them out of their heads.

The summer was passed miserably enough, and in the early autumn Maybury went to David Bayley, unveiled the entire affair to him, and asked his advice.

"I would a thousand times better be single," he said. "My wife treats me as distantly as if I were a stranger to whom she had recently been introduced. I have made explanations and apologies, until I can do no more. If this keeps up much longer I shall be driven crazy."

Mr. Bayley put on his most thoughtful look.

"This is not entirely new to me," he said. "I have seen a little of what was going on, and several times I have taken the liberty to reason with your wife about her conduct. The intimate relations which I held with her father justified me in that, I

think. Do you want my explanation of the state of her mind?"

"Go on," was the earnest reply.

"Well, it is this, in a nutshell. Mrs. Maybury has one of those sensitive organizations that are not made for marriage. She obeyed her father's wishes, like a dutiful child. The matrimonial state is associated in her mind with nothing but suffering. In the very shortest time possible she has had to go through all the unpleasant things that women dread, and she fears that they might be repeated. You are, in short, an object of terror to her. She dreads receiving you on anything like the old terms. It is a sad case, but I do not see that it has a remedy. Now, I would advise—but perhaps you do not want my advice?"

"I do. It is exactly what I came for."

"I would advise," resumed Bayley, "that you accept the situation, make no fuss about it, take a trip abroad, and see if time does not set things right. She will let you go, I am certain, and I am almost equally sure that she will send you word to return before many months are over. Sometimes the best thing to do with a horse or a woman is to give them their heads. While you stay together nothing can be done. She has a great amount of determination for such a little creature. Tell her you think of going away, and see what she says."

Maybury felt again how unpleasant it is to be told that one's wife would prefer his room to his company.

"It is damnable!" he ventured to remark.

"Of course," smiled the Architect. "Everything about marriage *is* damnable. I only recommended it to you as a financial investment, and so far as that

is concerned, you will admit that it has turned out well. I've told you what to do. Now you must be your own judge."

Before Maybury would act on this suggestion he made up his mind to try every thing else he could think of. The only result was that Flora grew more and more reserved toward him as the weeks passed away. She saw him at first at dinner—the bells which connected his apartments with hers were rung in vain. She was well enough; in fact she had a new color that made her much handsomer than ever before. But none of it was for him.

At last she declined to see him at all, taking her meals in her own apartments. Dr. Parton, who was begged to ascertain the reason of this conduct, reported that he was unable to fathom it. He said, as Bayley did, that the best thing he could think of to bring her around was a trip to some distant point. She would undoubtedly recover her natural demeanor, if left alone.

During this time Mr. Maybury saw very little of Esther Strange. He visited her not oftener than once a fortnight and wrote to her on the alternate weeks very brief, though kind, letters. As long as he had hope of patching up an armistice with his wife he felt a delicacy about being much in the company of the other girl. Finally, however, he concluded to do as he had been advised. He was very tired of living in a house of which he was not master, on the opposite side from a woman who refused to act the part of a wife.

The note that he sent in to Flora, telling her of his intention, was written in the most courteous manner. It said she had only to speak the word, and he would

remain with her; otherwise he must believe she desired him to cease acting the rôle of a husband entirely. The answer she sent him was very brief, and informed him in effect that she quite approved of his journey and trusted it would be a benefit to him. As for herself, her child now required all her attention. She ended the note by wishing him happiness, and asking that he write—occasionally.

Nothing could have been colder or more formal. The wife had not even expressed a wish to bid him good-bye in person. Nearly distracted by the situation, which he could not in the least explain, Maybury packed his things and sent for Esther. He could not bear to set out on his travels without one heart in which he could find sympathy. And to his delight the girl responded instantly, in person, ready to go wherever he went.

Their path was in a southerly direction, wending as the weather grew cooler back to that Mexico which both had learned to like so well, and from which they had parted so suddenly. They stopped at Celaya, for opals, at Puebla, Vera Cruz, Aguas Calientes, Guadalajara, and a dozen other places of interest, and when the new year opened were again in the Federal District. So little thought had they of danger or detection that they went about with perfect freedom in each other's company.

On Sunday mornings they visited the gigantic and most beautiful cathedral, where once they saw at least a hundred little Mexican mothers, not one of them over five feet in height, offering their tiny babies for the archbishop to christen; in the afternoon they drove on the Pasao amid the most picturesque concourse of riders and equipages to be

seen on the American continent ; at night they attended the circus. On other days they visited the Museum, inspecting the ancient relics, and marveling at the paintings, so much finer than they had expected to see in this mediæval country. The city was filled with parks and plazas, fountains and statues. They also drove out to Tacubaya, to the church of Guadaloupe, the fortress of Chapultepec and every other place of interest within many miles.

In these months Maybury almost renewed the youth he had been on the point of losing. He could not forget all that had made him unhappy, but the sweet companionship of Esther soothed the wounds he had received. The young girl confided in him implicitly now, as the only friend on whom she could rely. They were like two Arcadians, walking hand-in-hand through the world, preferring the dreams they loved to the reality to which waking must bring them.

Among the resorts which they both liked best was the Viga Canal, that semi-Venetian and artificial stream that runs from a point in the outskirts of the City of Mexico a long distance into the country. They were frequently in the habit of hiring a boat and going to the Chimpañas, or floating gardens, and sometimes much farther. Partially concealed by the awning, they would lie at ease, in the bottom of their frail craft, enjoying the slow ride past the strangest villages and the queerest people ; meeting market boats loaded with vegetables and many pleasure craft filled with happy singers and mandolin players, making the most delightful music. Nowhere, except it be in Japan, are the natives so childlike. Often, to amuse himself, Douglass would call out,

"Buenos tardes!" to some boat-load of people, and the response, given with the utmost politeness, always came quickly.

February arrived, and still the travelers had no thought of leaving these delightful scenes. But, one evening, as they were floating at a snail's pace back to the city, on the bosom of this strange canal, another pleasure-boat passed them, covered like theirs with a canopy of cloth. The voice of one of its occupants could be distinctly heard from beneath the canvas, and Maybury turned toward Esther with startled eyes.

"It is *she!*" he whispered, in the greatest agitation. "It is *my wife!* What can she be doing here?"

"Hush," replied the girl, in an equally low tone. "She cannot see us under this covering. Keep perfectly quiet."

Just then a peal of musical laughter came to the ears of the listeners from the occupants of the other boat.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"ARREST THIS MAN!"

Unable to resist the temptation, Douglass Maybury peered beneath the awnings. When he raised his gaze again to Esther he wore an expression that frightened her to the utmost. There was a horrible twitching of the muscles, and both his eyes were filled with little flakes of red.

This is what he had seen. His wife sat low in her boat with one of her arms about the neck of Austin Strange, whose head lay against her bosom. With her disengaged hand she was stroking the hair of the carpenter. At the very moment when the husband beheld them she was imprinting the warmest of kisses upon his cheek! Near by, apparently not at all surprised at the tableau, the French maid, Margot, sat smiling upon the pair.

Obeying his first impulse Douglass drew Esther down where she could be a witness of this astonishing scene. Otherwise he did not move. His sufferings were so acute, and his head was in such a whirl, that he could not think of any plan of action.

"There is no one near us who speaks anything but Spanish, you silly girl," Mrs. Maybury was saying in French to the maid. "We can use any other language without the least fear of discovery."

This was evidently said in reply to a remark which had called forth the laugh that attracted Maybury's attention.

"But you know Monsieur is somewhere in Mexico," protested the more careful Margot. "And it would not be nice to have him get word of this."

"He is still at Toluca," replied Flora, smiling. "But even if he were here, and could see and hear me, I don't know as I should care *very* much. I am tired of him. If he should say a word I would ask him where he had left his own belle-amie. The farce of pretending to be an obedient wife is ended."

Maybury's hand on Esther's arm tightened. She could only imperfectly understand what had been said, as her education in French was more theoretical

than practical, but her fears threw her into a state of intense excitement.

"What are you talking about?" came gruffly from the lips of young Strange. "It is just as well to speak English."

"Forgive me," said Flora, in a most caressing tone. "We were speaking of Mr. Maybury, and I was remarking that if we should ever meet I should have very little to say to him. If he will keep away another year I can get a divorce for desertion. And then, my darling, I shall be yours forever!"

The husband uttered a groan, so low that no one but Esther heard it, but filled with such pain that it thrilled her with horror. The boats floated within thirty feet of each other, and the boatmen, old acquaintances, were talking familiarly in the mixed native and Spanish dialect.

"You know well, Austin," said the wife, after a moment's pause, "that had it not been for the affection I bore my father, I could never have endured all that misery! How dreadful to marry a man I did not love when my whole heart was yours! Except for our child I would have refused as long as I lived, but that left no alternative. What do you think Mr. Maybury would say if he knew whose baby it was, and that it was born two months earlier than he believes?"

Esther wound her arms around Douglass, holding him down. He had feebly struggled to rise to his feet. One of her hands was placed upon his mouth. She felt that something dreadful must happen soon. He breathed like a man *in extremis*.

"It is really amusing," continued Flora, and again her musical laugh rang out on the languorous

air. "It is too awfully funny to think of all the pains I had to take to deceive him, getting that dunce of a Parton to help me out, and bringing all my wits to bear to deceive Mr. Bayley, who, I more than half believe, suspects everything. Mr. Maybury only glanced at the child, but he wouldn't have known if it had been a year old instead of the fortnight he thought. And when I looked at him in such an injured way, as if my heart was broken at his long neglect, the tears came into his poor eyes! Oh, I thought surely I should die of laughing when he had gone from the room and you and Saccard and Margot came back! And every day Parton would come in with such stories of his dejection, and his anxiety for my health!"

The French maid interposed once more.

"Really, madame," she protested, "you forget how loud you are speaking."

"Give your advice when it is asked, Margot," was the short reply of her mistress. "Do you think these market people or these boatmen understand me? I am as free here as any bird, not only to do as I please, but to utter my closest thoughts. Austin," she added, bending lovingly over her companion, "of what are you thinking? Are you not glad to be with me where no one can question us? Does it make you happy not to pretend to be my servant in the presence of so many people, when you know I would lie in the dust for your feet to walk on me?"

The young carpenter made a half-audible response, which seemed to satisfy her, for she bent over him again and kissed him upon the mouth.

"Ah, my God!" exclaimed the wife, "I never kiss

you but I think of that terrible week after my marriage, when I had to endure my husband's caresses. I had wept myself wild at the thought that it would have to be, for the six weeks that preceded the ceremony, but I was no more prepared than ever. You know how I risked so much to come back to you the evening I was married. I would have endured exposure, my father's anger, anything, rather than not have sought you out, after you left that parlor, so wan and white! Do I not deserve to be happy with you, if only for the terrible sacrifice I made in resigning myself to his arms, to save your child from disgrace? And it troubles me, too, my darling, that when Gwendolin grows to be a woman she never can know who is her real father. She will bear a name that her mother has learned to hate!"

Under the hands that clung to Mr. Maybury Esther could feel the hot flesh, burning as with a fever. The girl could only hope that the boats would ultimately drift apart, and put an end to the awful strain on the listener most interested. She recognized the face and voice of her brother, and knew that it was he who had been the partner in sin of the young wife. But the boats clung as closely together as if they were sentient beings, gifted with a knowledge of what was transpiring upon their decks and feeling a malignant joy at the impending crisis.

Austin Strange only replied to the rhapsodies of his companion by a monosyllable. He seemed much more engaged in watching the scenes along the bank of the canal than in listening to her words. The more thickly settled sections of the city were looming up before them. It would not be long now

ere they would be at the Iturbide Hotel, where a good dinner undoubtedly awaited their coming.

"What a life I led all through my childhood!" Flora exclaimed, seeing nothing but the countenance of him she loved. "Everything that money could buy was lavished on me, but I never was content. That day I saw you first, working at your bench, I knew an end must come of all my *ennui*. Madame Saccard and Margot made it so easy for me to seek you. They both knew what it was to have a lover, and that the possession of wealth made no change in the heart of a girl. You remember, Margot," she said, speaking to the maid, "how you searched for him and made him meet me, pretending that he might lose his situation—ha! ha!—unless he did. And after that he came to our house on Fifty-second street every evening, to show me the carving he was doing, taking his pay for extra time and never seeming to understand! How it ever came about I do not know, for you were the slowest darling that ever lived," she continued, addressing herself again to Austin. "At last, however, you saw that it was *you*, and not the stupid wood, that I wanted. From that hour I was in Elysium! I could not wait till evening for you, but used to go and stand where I could see you, happy to be in the same house, under the same roof!"

Crossing the Viga Canal are numerous bridges, built low like those at Venice. Whenever a boat has to go beneath one of these arches, the boatman utters a cry of warning, and lowers by a small lever the canopy that hangs above the passengers. At this moment a bridge was encountered and the canvas drooped over Mrs. Maybury and her compan-

ions, shutting them temporarily out of sight. She seized the opportunity to press her lips once more to those of her lover, as if she could not bear that any of the honey upon them should escape her. And when her husband, whose boat-covering fell also a second later, found it raised into its usual place, this was the sight that met his dazed and outraged eyes.

Esther Strange held to Douglass with the strength of desperation. She still hoped that something would happen to separate the boats from each other. She believed that if they once got far enough apart to enable her to talk with him unheard, she could persuade him to leave Mexico without seeking an interview with this dreadful woman who had so dishonored him. Maybury's head was ready to burst. His throat was parched. His skin was aflame. His pulses were uneven. He lay in the bottom of that boat, suffering as if it were made of red-hot iron, but not ready yet to move.

"It was so long, so very long," said Flora, when the bridge was passed, "before I could find a way to have you wholly to myself! I had to pretend a great deal more illness than I felt, though the constant worry about you made me pale enough. It was not papa alone who had to be won over to the idea that I needed you to help me in my travels. He was ready to indorse anything his Architect favored. Fortune was on my side and at last Mr. Bayley secured you for me. That made everything easy. I did not have to wait till evening for you to come, dragging the long, dull days in restlessness. I did not have to dread the clock striking ten at

night, knowing that you would consider it a signal to start for your own home. You were *mine*, then, *all mine!* Madame Saccard, and Margot, and Dr. Parton were in my secret—and nobody else knew or needed to know."

Austin rose abruptly and signalled to his boatman to remove altogether the awning that had hidden the voyagers. They were now so near the end of their trip that he wanted to begin preparations for landing. The delay in rowing made by this caused the second boat, containing Maybury and Esther, to pass slightly ahead. Douglass could now see the entire group, and he noticed above all that his wife wore the brightest smile he had ever seen upon her face.

"There have been so many queer things," said Flora, and her voice came clearly to him over the water. "You remember, dear, when we found Mr. Maybury in that can-can hall in New Orleans, and I drank wine with him without his ever suspecting my identity. I was half inclined to like him when I saw his flaming eyes watching the wild dance I gave, but my heart was already won. I wonder who that little silly creature was who accompanied us to the wine-room, and was mortally afraid she would see my stockings. And what a fright I had, do you remember, when I lost the mate to this article." (She paused long enough to show it to him.) "And all the time poor Douglass thought me an angel and a saint!"

Rippling out upon the bosom of the Canal came again the laughter of the young wife, at this pleasing reminiscence. Austin, paying little if any attention to her, stood up in the boat, looking at a more interesting spectacle. With the fearlessness of onlookers

that characterizes the natives of Mexico, half-a-dozen young women were bathing in perfect nudity a hundred feet away.

"We are almost there," said the young man, at last, in a remarkable burst of loquacity.

Esther could restrain Mr. Maybury no longer. One of his hands had found its way to a rear pocket, and when it emerged it held a revolver tightly grasped within it.

"I beg you to think!" she whispered, in agony. "He is my brother!"

If he heard her he did not reply. His boatman came at that moment to take away the awning that hid them, and Maybury did nothing to prevent him. The stopping of the paddle allowed the other boat to pass this one. When Douglass threw off the clinging girl with brute force he faced the lover of his wife, who was standing with folded arms, his back toward the prow of his craft.

"Austin! It is Mr. Maybury! He will kill you!" screamed Esther.

Flora Maybury was upon her feet before these sentences were ended. Seeing the situation, she threw both her arms with a protecting motion around the body of her lover.

"So that is the girl for whom you left me?" she cried. "I think we may call it quits!"

It was a most peculiar tableau. The wife's embrace was about her lover, while that lover's sister held the husband as tightly as she could, hoping to avert the aim which she had good reason to fear would be deadly.

Austin was the picture of determination. Whatever else showed in his bronzed countenance there

was nothing there of the coward. He tried unsuccessfully to unclasp Flora's arms from his body. The boats were too far apart to permit him to attack his enemy with natural weapons, the only ones he had with him, but he wanted to be free to act in an emergency. He saw the revolver, but he did not flinch. He waited, like some superb animal, for an opportunity to spring.

Both the boatmen, when they saw what was going on, began to paddle frantically toward their destination. Perhaps it struck them that the nearer the police they could get the better. At any rate the boats flew through the water at astonishing speed. Wrenching his arm partly from Esther's control, Maybury fired point-blank at her brother, but without hitting him. Subsequent shots, thrown out of their course by the struggle he was constantly having with the girl, made no more impression.

"Would you be a murderer, too?" came the shrill voice of Mrs. Maybury. "You, who have given him the greater cause? Assassin, you are firing at an unarmed man!"

The boats were being separated every moment. Austin Strange's boatman was more athletic than the other, and at each sweep of his paddle he was increasing the distance between the antagonists. With the strength of desperation Esther clung to her companion, though he made every effort to be free of her. Five shots, thanks to her intervention, had passed harmlessly into the air. As Maybury was about to take the sixth one an agency that had not been taken into account made his work superfluous. Austin suddenly fell forward, as if struck by a club.

And Flora, clinging to him, was thrown to the bottom of the boat by the force of his fall.

Esther dragged Maybury to his knees by the desperate exercise of her full strength. A collision was now inevitable.

It was one of the low bridges that had done the deed. With his back to it, too much occupied to heed the cry of the boatman, Austin Strange had received the full force of the masonry against his head.

The boats touched. Springing furiously upon the other craft, Maybury raised his empty pistol. He was about to strike the recumbent figure when the French maid stopped him with a scream.

"Monsieur! He is dead already!" she cried. "And, madame—oh! I fear it has killed her, too!"

The shock of what he heard—especially the closing words, had such an effect upon the husband that he let his weapon fall into the Canal, where it soon sought the slimy bottom. Bending over his wife, with a tenderness hardly lessened by the revelations of the last quarter hour, he saw her open her eyes slowly.

"Have you killed him?" she asked, hoarsely. "If you have, you shall pay—life for life!"

Esther and Margot dragged the heavy form of the carpenter from that of Mrs. Maybury, with difficulty. Douglass would not assist them, and the boatmen stood as if paralyzed with fright.

It was no time for words. The French maid, afraid of nothing, tore open the vest of the prostrate figure and listened at the chest. There was not the faintest flutter of the heart. Flora saw the hopeless look with which the girl made the discovery, and

with a wild cry of anguish threw herself on the dead form.

"Austin, Austin!" she cried. "Do not let them tell me that you are dead! *Live*, for the sake of our little child; for the sake of our love so deep and strong! *Live*, that we may defy those that hate us and make our lives one long holiday of joy!" Then she fell into a paroxysm of tears. "He does not speak! He will never speak to me again!" she screamed.

"*But you!*" She rose and gazed with intense loathing into the eyes of her husband. "You had better have died at your birth than to have seen this day!"

Maybury drew back from the enraged woman, and pressed his hand to his side. Turning from him she scanned the shore with her keen gaze and saw—to her delight—an officer of police, cantering along the roadway.

"Here!" she cried, in her loudest key. "This man has committed a murder! Arrest him! I charge him with this deed!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT BAYLEY TOLD PARTON.

Six months later two men were conversing earnestly in a New York club-house over their "walnuts and wine." They were David Bayley and Dr. Parton.

"Then everything is satisfactory, is it?" said the Architect. "Your bill is receipted in full and you start for Europe to-morrow?"

"Precisely. Mrs. Maybury has been more than liberal. I shall not need to practice medicine for years, unless I choose. And now I want you to tell me about that Mexican trip of yours, of which I have only had as yet an inkling. Begin at the beginning, and let me have the entire story."

Mr. Bayley thought a moment, before replying. Then he said that he saw no objection to humoring his companion.

"It was about the last of February," he began, "that I got word of the trouble, and went immediately to the City of Mexico. Mrs. Maybury seemed to think, because I was to execute her father's will, that I ought to help to execute her husband also. She told me he was in jail, awaiting trial, and that she would never rest until he had been punished for his brutal and cold-blooded murder of her 'servant.' Although I believed at first that she had given the true version of young Strange's death—that Maybury had struck him with a blunt instrument—it wasn't my notion that he would look any better after those Mexicans had emptied a lot of cold lead into him. How to satisfy her, and at the same time save my old friend, was the puzzle I had to set about unraveling.

"The local agent of one of the great railways was known to me, the Senator having been quite a large shareholder in the company. Through him I learned that there was no other key so effective in that country as a golden one. Instead of asking the authorities for permission to visit the prisoner I quietly took a guide and bribed the men in charge of the prison to let me in. Maybury was as comfortable in his situation as could be expected. He had been able to

buy good food and plenty of bedding. As for the rest he didn't seem to care. He was the most downhearted man I ever saw. All he could think of was the dreadful death of young Strange, which had affected him tremendously. And in the desultory talk that he made I got my first information of the fact that the fellow had whacked his head against a bridge and that Maybury had nothing at all to do with his taking off.

"I asked him if he was doing anything toward a defense, and he said he was not. He didn't exactly want to die, but he wasn't doing a thing to save himself. Although he hadn't laid his hand on Strange, he felt that the young man had died from his fault—that he would have been alive now if it hadn't been for him. He said to me, over and over, that he had tried his best to kill him—firing every shot in his revolver with that intent. When I hinted that he might feel somewhat justified, he would not listen. He had been mad. If his wife had loved another man better that her husband it did not give him the right to commit murder. And it was Esther's brother, too. That troubled him a great deal. He had not seen the girl since his arrest, refusing to allow her to enter his cell. He did not believe he could face her. He was glad I had called and hoped I would come again. I told him the way I had gained admittance, and urged him not to mention my visit. Then, saying he would hear from me often, I went away.

"My next step was to engage a lawyer. This lawyer soon discovered that both of the boatmen and the French maid, Margot, were ready to swear that Maybury brained Strange with his own hands.

Indeed, their depositions were already on file to this effect. It was a hard place to be in, I tell you. Every person but Esther who had seen the affair were against our friend. The railroad agent and the Spanish lawyer finally agreed on one thing. The court would certainly convict the prisoner whenever he was brought to trial. We must help him to escape in some way."

Dr. Parton could not help interrupting.

"Do you say that Flo—I mean Mrs. Maybury—stuck to the same story, herself."

"Like a leech. I talked to her about it repeatedly and she never varied her recital by the width of a hair. She told me she was boating on the Viga with her 'servants' when her husband and 'that woman of his' passed them. Austin had no warning. Maybury jumped up and began firing at him a lot of pot-shots. When none of them took effect on the surprised young fellow, the man sprang into her boat, she said, and dealt Austin a terrible blow with a piece of wood. There was no reason that she could ascribe for his conduct. Austin was the quietest, most peaceable boy that ever lived—why, I had seen him enough myself to know that. The only thing she could think of as a cause for the assault was the fact that Esther was with Maybury, and he might have feared that the brother would remonstrate against such an open scandal as their relations were making.

"I put a hundred questions to her, and she never turned an atom. I reminded her that a conviction of her husband would be a stain on her name and on that of her child, but to no effect. She said the horror of the murder had made such an impression on

her mind that she had lost every other consideration in the feeling that his crime ought to be punished. If she was taken before a tribunal she would speak and tell the truth. I told her, after I had been to the prison, what Maybury said, pretending I had heard it from an outsider, and she answered that the boatmen and Margot were her witnesses. It was a nice mess to get out of, wasn't it?"

Dr. Parton replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, that it was, indeed.

"And how *did* you get out of it?" he added, with great interest.

"Where there's a will there's a way, as you may have heard some one remark. I merely let the case be tried and the verdict be recorded. I don't mean that we didn't cross-question those confounded Mexican boatmen—and where examinations are done in writing, this takes time; but Maybury would not let us call the only other witness besides himself to the real reason of Strange's death. He said the lawyers would be almost certain to insinuate something about her character, which was as pure as the snow that is driven. He wouldn't risk that. He told his own story, and it was met with the oaths of three persons that he was a liar. A verdict was recorded of his guilt and he was sentenced to be shot."

The listener winced, as he heard the words. It was as if a minie-ball had just whistled over his shoulder, close to his ear.

"Of course I had seen the girl," pursued the narrator, quietly. "If I had not convinced her that we would yet save Maybury's life she would have moved heaven and earth—and perhaps (though it may be doubted) the government at Washington—to

get him free. The lawyer and I persuaded her that we could do more if she did not interfere. She was a sad sight those days, though! Talk about attachment! She would have given her heart's blood with the greatest of good-will for the man who had tried to kill her brother. And what had we to do? Why, get a good sized sum of money, of course, and put it where it would do the most good.

"The way the law is carried out in Mexico differs materially from the method practiced in the United States. Outside of military executions there are hardly any legal deaths in that country under the regulation form. Such offenders as train robbers and common highwaymen are shot at sight without the least compunction, wherever found. Criminals who are deemed worthy of a trial are generally taken after sentence, by a detachment of soldiers, from one prison to another, and—they never arrive. 'The prisoner attempted an escape and we were obliged to fire at him,' is the indorsement on the mittamus. Much better than to bother the sheriff, isn't it? We found that this would most likely be the way they would dispose of poor Douglass. It cost us two thousand dollars to get the programme varied in merely one very slight particular."

The Architect paused, to give his tale the force of a new start.

"They were to take him across the country to another jail, on a certain day. According to custom he was to be shot soon after they were out of sight of the city. The two thousand dollars that I handed over was to get the bullets drawn from the guns that were to be fired at him. It was all nicely fixed. The place where the guard would stop for supper

was known to us. Near by we had horses and everything else in readiness, at the foot of a ravine. The prisoner was to be given a chance to run for his life at about dusk. The guns were not to be too handy and when they had been fired the other ammunition was to be misplaced. It worked to a charm. The men not in the secret must have thought their superiors exceedingly stupid, but they knew enough to say nothing.

"My only fear was that Maybury would refuse to run when the time came, for he was so absent-minded that he hardly seemed to take the trouble to breathe. But he did very well. He made, as had been agreed upon, toward the edge of a lake, in which it was to be reported that he had sunk after being shot. Darkness was upon us all and we got away easily. The guides I had hired knew the country. We caught a train for Vera Cruz and before any statement reached headquarters we were out of the country."

The physician remarked that this must have had a very agreeable flavor for all of them.

"But what became of Miss Esther?" he added.

"She was with us during the whole expedition, and exhibited the greatest fortitude. On the steamer she persuaded Maybury that he had no guilt in her eyes, and they were reconciled. I watched them closely for the next two days, and I tell you, Parton, I believe in the virtue of that girl. I hadn't believed in it, in spite of his assertions, for any man worthy of the name will lie to protect the honor of his sweetheart. But I used my eyes and my ears, when they had no idea they were not alone, and I would wager all I'm worth on her chastity."

Dr. Parton could not help letting a smile creep across his face.

"You'd have done the same for Mrs. M., a year ago," he remarked.

"Well, I would," acknowledged the other. "There aren't many cases like hers. I began to think something was wrong, though, when we were at New Orleans. If you had been half the friend to me you pretended you would have let me into that."

The physician shook his head sagely.

"If doctors told all they know, my dear fellow," he said, "this world would not be safe to live in. We are full of private information that would disrupt continents. A priest of the Catholic church does not hear more important secrets than the average family physician. I couldn't tell you a word, and you would have gone to your grave without knowing it, for all of me. But, about these platonic friendships, I am always sceptical. It's not according to human nature. And what will be the ultimate result, do you suppose? Maybury can't go on, traveling up and down the earth with an unmarried girl, can he?"

Mr. Bayley smiled quizzically.

"He *can*, but I don't think he *will*," said he. "When his wife learned of his escape from death, she entered a suit for divorce on the ground of desertion. She has had word from him that he will not oppose her, so long as she does not in any way bring the name of Miss Strange into the affair. The suit is entered in Van Buren, where she claims her present residence. When it is granted there will be nothing, under our system of marriage laws, to stop him

offering his hand and heart to the girl who has done so much to win them."

"Excellent! And what do you suppose Mrs. M. will do the rest of her life?"

"Live in Mexico and continue to wear mourning. She had an infatuation for that young carpenter that amounted to mania. She will never love another man. Her residence, that cost me so much time and the Senator such a mint of money, is in the market. One of the editors of the *Planet* has made an offer for it. I doubt if she will ever return. Her life is devoted to the child—*his* child, as she confessed to me in a burst of candor, the last time I saw her. And it was on that confession that I secured her consent to have Douglass pardoned."

Dr. Parton opened his eyes wider.

"She's a queer one," he remarked. "And about Charles? The same Quixotic philanthropist, as ever?"

"Yes. More so if anything. His sister positively refused to see him when he went to her. A terrible break-up all around, isn't it? By-the-way, do you know about the tomb that Mrs. Maybury has ordered for her lover? It is to cost a hundred thousand, and there is an inscription to go upon it fit for a hero and a martyr! It will be erected on her own estate near the City of Mexico, which she has purchased for a permanent residence."

Something in this caused the physician to laugh softly to himself.

"You are making a good thing out of the family, I hope," he said.

"Well, not so bad. I have charge of everything, you know."

A PARTING WORD.

Last winter, when I was in Mexico, being one evening at Tacubaya, my attention was attracted to a handsome American woman, still young, attired in deep mourning, playing for large stakes at a roulette table. One of the bystanders remarked to me that she frequently lost and won hundreds of dollars at a sitting, and that she engaged nightly in the same occupation.

"But she isn't likely to play long enough to dissipate her fortune," he added, in that familiar way which travelers often use toward each other. "Her name is Mrs. Maybury. Her father was an American Senator, who left her a yearly income of over half a million. She is a widow, I believe, and she has one child, to whom she is devotedly attached. You can see them riding out together any pleasant afternoon. Wait a moment—she always leaves at midnight."

The croupier pushed toward the player a pile of notes, thirty-six times the amount she had wagered on one of the numbers, and at that moment a dignified French woman leaned over the lady's shoulder.

"It is twelve o'clock," she said.

"Very well, Saccard," was the languid reply. "Has Margot come?"

The Frenchwoman indicated an affirmative.

Mrs. Maybury rose from the table, and Madame Saccard gathered up the money that represented her winnings. As they walked toward the door, a hundred pairs of eyes followed them.

"It is worth your while to watch her a little longer," said my new acquaintance. "Come with me to the entrance."

Curiosity led me to accept the invitation. A maid was waiting with a carriage for her mistress.

"Did you see Celeste, just as you came away, Margot," asked Mrs. Maybury.

"Oui, madame."

"And Gwendolin was sleeping peacefully?"

"Parfaitement."

A crowd of ragamuffins that had gathered in the vicinity pressed around the carriage. They were evidently expecting something.

"Saccard!" said Mrs. Maybury, wearily.

"Oui, madame."

"Give that money to these poor fellows."

The French woman had put half or more of the amount in her pocket, with a sly motion. The rest of it she threw to the rabble, as one throws offal to carrion birds. There was a scramble, and well there might be. Not less than a thousand dollars was in the heap.

"She does that every evening," whispered the stranger in my ear.

As the carriage we were watching was about to be driven away, another arrived and stopped in front of it. A gentleman within was explaining to his lady companion the character of the gambling-house, at which he had no intention of alighting. Looking up he saw the face of faces that he would rather not have met.

There was a perceptible shock to all parties. Mrs. Maybury, who had been leaning back on her cushions, sat bolt upright.

"It's his old mistress, Saccard," she said, in a voice loud and harsh. "They say he has married her. Well, *it was time!*"

A peal of derisive laughter came from her vanishing carriage. Douglass Maybury turned to the trembling figure at his side.

"Do not mind her, Esther," he said. "She is to be pitied quite as much as blamed. It was her father's theory that girls need no instruction in morals—that they should be allowed to act out what is in them. She must have inherited passions which a good mother would have curbed, but which that detestable Saccard fanned into resistless flame."

"Yes," mused Esther, her eyes full of tears. "And, after all, Douglass, *she loved him!*"

THE END.

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